

THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON
USERS OF PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND NA-
TIONAL PARKS

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE
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THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON USERS OF PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND NATIONAL PARKS

THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2020

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:21 a.m. in Room SD-366, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Lisa Murkowski, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI, U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning everyone, the Committee will come to order. We are a few members shy this morning, including my Ranking Member. As you know, we are in the beginning of a series of votes this morning that just began at ten o'clock. So you will see a little bit of disruption in addition to the hybrid look of today's hearing, but as we do here in the Senate, we improvise and we are flexible. My hope this morning is that we will be able to open the hearing and hear from our witnesses before we get interrupted again for a second vote. We appreciate the flexibility of our witnesses and welcome each of you.

We are here this morning to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on users of our public lands, our national forests and our treasured national parks. Five months ago the novel Coronavirus became a global pandemic, changing nearly every aspect of life as we know it. Public health intervention measures were necessary to try to slow the spread of the virus, but they have also impacted the use, the management and the enjoyment of our federal lands.

So let's start with our national parks. They normally attract more than 120 million visitors from March through July. In a typical year, visitors spend \$21 billion on travel, lodging, food and shopping inside our parks and in our neighboring gateway communities. Now obviously this is not a normal year and the numbers certainly show it. Visitation is down 22 percent in our national parks. Fewer visitors means less income and employment for rural tourism dependent on small businesses. The National Park Hospitality Association forecasts a 46 percent decline in revenue for hundreds of park concessionaires this year. I think we recognize that sadly some of these smaller businesses will not survive.

I saw several examples of these impacts myself over the Fourth of July recess when I was back home in Alaska. I had an opportunity to visit Denali National Park and Katmai National Park. On my way into Denali I stopped in the community of Talkeetna, just outside the park. This is a community that relies very, very heavily on that summer tourism—those tourists who want to come up to see Denali but also those who go climbing on the mountain, the entire climbing season was cut off this year. I was able to talk with the owner of a flightseeing company. They provide aviation services and spectacular flyovers of the mountain and ferry our hunters around during the fall season. Their situation is pretty dire right now. They were not able to receive a PSP loan. They are very, very worried that they are not going to make it through the end of the year. Normally they operate during this part of the season. They operate upwards of 20 planes on any given day. They only have three in circulation now. I mean, that is significant. If you only have three aircraft, that means you have fewer pilots. You have fewer maintainers. It just trickles all throughout.

And that business is not alone. I heard the same from other small businesses within the community. I visited a small boating company. They offer tours up the river. They were only operating two or three boats up the Talkeetna, again, at a time when they and their crews would just be going gangbusters at this point in time. I stopped by the local brewery there in Talkeetna, one of the largest employers in that community. They have seen a 60 percent decline in revenue. Then at Katmai, I had an opportunity to speak with the concessionaires there at Brooks Lodge. They are providing only day services rather than the overnight accommodations. They are going to be looking to see if it is possible to adjust that for a very brief window, maybe a month or so. But again, this is a lodge that normally would be booked solid for months and months in advance. These businesses bear the burden of trying to bring in enough revenue to break even or just survive while also welcoming visitors and ensuring safe, socially distancing operations. I was encouraged as I was in the parks to see almost everyone wearing masks. They were adhering to the public health mandates, even in these very, very remote areas.

Outdoor recreation has also taken a big hit in our national forests. The outfitter and guide businesses that operate on these lands are often seasonal, small mom and pop shops that really rely on the visitor travel, and the loss of customers during the peak season has just been devastating. And in speaking with so many of them, they are looking at having to, again, discontinue their services entirely. I think it is important, particularly in a place like Alaska where whether it is your national parks or your national forests and the visitation, our visitation is May through the end of September. Beyond that, you just don't see people visiting in Katmai in November. You don't see people visiting as tourists in the Tongass in February. It just doesn't happen. So for those who say we just need to flatten this curve and get beyond it and everything is going to be okay, for our industry, for our sector here, it is gone. It is done for 2020. And they are worried whether they can survive through the beginning of the season in 2021. This is very, very real and, of course, it is not just for us in Alaska.

I mentioned winter and whether or not we do see that level of tourism. We know that winter recreation did not escape COVID either. The 2019–2020 ski season was cut short, forcing every ski area on our national forests to close early. As a skier, it was devastating to me because we had such a great, epic ski year in so many of our areas and we were not skiing.

The virus is also threatening the way our public lands are used to produce food and water. Dam and canal operators typically finance large amounts of debt to build infrastructure that transports water from watersheds in our national forests to cities and to farms, and family-owned ranchers carefully budget for infrastructure and livestock purchases to ensure rangeland health and productivity under the terms of their grazing permits. Some individuals are now struggling to pay their water bills and others are buying less meat. This exposes ranchers, farmers and water providers to financial risks that jeopardize their continued operation.

Impacts on state governments are also having a ripple effect on federal land management. Many state habitat, wildlife and invasive species activities did not occur this spring or this summer. Some states stopped all non-essential field work, including prescribed burns and forest restoration projects on neighboring federal lands. Others could not spawn fish in hatcheries which has reduced angling opportunities and could possibly compromise long-term aquatic species restoration goals. In Alaska, we see a prime example of this. The sale of non-resident hunting and fishing licenses accounts for a substantial portion of funding for our Department of Fish and Game. By some estimates, the Department could lose up to 60 percent of its revenue stream because of this year's depressed tourism season. Without that revenue, the state is going to have a hard time meeting the matching requirements for the Pittman-Robertson grants or the stateside portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Here we are going to have a great opportunity for access to greater LWCF funds, but if the state can't meet the matching, it is like we have not helped them at all.

Today we are going to hear testimony from several public land user advisor advocacy groups, and as we do it is important to consider the scale of the Federal Government's reach. It is the single largest landowner in the United States, possessing more than a quarter of all land within our borders, more than 640 million acres in total. The vast majority of those acres are located in Alaska and across 11 Western states. COVID-19 has added a whole new layer of complexity to public land management. We need to ensure the Federal Government is supporting the users who are essential job creators and environmental stewards while also respecting the wishes of the local communities who call those areas home.

With that, I turn to my friend and colleague, Ranking Member Manchin, for your opening remarks.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOE MANCHIN III,
U.S. SENATOR FROM WEST VIRGINIA**

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Chairman Murkowski, and I thank all of you for being here today and those, I think we have a couple on the video and we appreciate your expertise too for sharing it with us.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that we now have 141,000 people who have died in the United States from this horrendous virus including 102 West Virginians. Our heart goes out to each one of their families and all those left behind, and it is just a horrible, horrible, horrible, tragic event.

Today we are going to be discussing the COVID-19 impacts on users of public lands. As the case with nearly every facet of our society, most users of public lands are continuing to experience a disruption to business as usual due to the Coronavirus. I believe it is important for public lands to remain open, accessible, when it is safely possible to do so, not only because they offer a wonderful respite and a way to enjoy our great outdoors, but also because they are important generators of economic activity, especially, and I mean especially, for rural America and West Virginia is all rural. Last week I held a virtual feedback session with West Virginia leaders to hear directly from them about how we can better utilize and direct future COVID-19 funding. Precisely what I asked them, tell me what did not work for you in the first round of funding that was designed to work for you but did not. Tell me what is the greatest need you have now. If we could pinpoint just one thing, just give me one. And so, every category, we had over 43 different representations of all different facets of life in West Virginia, and they all had some great, great input to this. It has been very helpful.

A major problem we are facing in West Virginia is getting CARES Act funding out the door to counties and local governments. Even the monies that the states have received, \$1.25 billion to the smallest states and some of you are from states like mine. The governors haven't put them out and put the money out. Forty-five percent of that was intended. So if you were a small state with \$1.25 billion, \$560 million was supposed to, it wasn't in the law, but it was supposed to go to the counties, municipalities, non-profits, every one of the aspect to keep economies alive, anybody that got, basically, harmed because of COVID-19 which everything you're talking about today and you're representing, got slammed. That money was to be used to keep them whole or try to keep them above water, so when a market does return. And I tell people, if you think this market is going to return before there is a vaccine or an antibody, you are crazy. So people are still scared. We must live with that fact until we get a vaccine. It is going to be rough but if the money is not distributed, it makes it even rougher. So I hope all of you go back home, and start raising cane for your share because I can tell you, the national average is 16 percent, only 16 percent of the money the governors have gotten has gone out to the local communities and been distributed around their states.

I raise that point in relation to the conversation we are having here today because in many states those governments rely on federal payment and revenue sharing programs from federal land management agencies to offset the loss of revenues due to the presence of public lands in their jurisdictions. It includes important programs like Secure Rural Schools, Payment in Lieu of Taxes, the Dingell-Johnson funds for fish restoration and royalty payments for energy development. Each of these programs provide important

lifelines to the states and communities all across the country that are experiencing unprecedented threats to their budgets due to the Coronavirus. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that we just passed the Great American Outdoors Act, and that Great American Outdoors Act is going to do so much.

I want to take the time to acknowledge David Brooks. He has been working on this Committee for 32 years. David and I were talking and he said, "I never thought this day would come. This is the greatest achievement we have made in the last half a century, 50 years or more, and I think all of us are going to benefit by it."

I look forward to hearing from each one of you about your concerns and challenges. I also hope we will be able to hear from the Department of the Interior and Forest Service in the near future so that we can better understand their plans for reopening federal lands in a manner that protects the health and safety of public land visitors and agency employees, consistent with federal and state health guidelines.

I would like to take a moment and turn to some good news and that is, again, the Great American Outdoors Act, which we are very, very pleased about. It will be a major investment that public land users in this great country will enjoy for generations to come, and I know my children and grandchildren will enjoy it. The Great American Outdoors Act is going to provide permanent and mandatory funding for Land and Water Conservation Fund, at a fully authorized level of \$900 million annually and \$9.5 billion for deferred maintenance for projects on federal lands with 70 percent of that amount dedicated to national parks. Passage of the bill's historic achievement, I believe, everyone understands that is in this line of work and everyone who has ever enjoyed the outdoors. The fact that we were able to get this bill through the Senate and the House in a relatively short timeframe in the most toxic environment I have ever lived through in my life, speaks volumes of the importance of the great outdoors and the conservation and the environment that we are all responsible for.

With that, I want to thank Chair Murkowski for having this hearing, and I look forward to hearing from all of you and the witnesses.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Manchin.

I think we are looking forward to having the President sign the Great American Outdoors Act and, as you point out, finalizing—

Senator MANCHIN. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. —and ensuring that good work goes forward.

We are joined by a strong panel here this morning as we are looking at the impacts of COVID-19 on our public lands. We are going to begin our panel this morning with a couple of witnesses that are joining us virtually and three that are here in person.

We are going to start this morning with the Honorable Kelly Hepler, who is the Secretary for the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks on behalf of the Association of the Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). I think it is important to also note that in addition to his work in South Dakota, Mr. Hepler was in the State of Alaska for about 35 years, as I understand, working for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. So he is uniquely poised to speak, not only about Alaska's perspectives and operations but

also where he is in South Dakota with their Department of Game, Fish and Parks. So we welcome Mr. Hepler to the Committee.

Also virtually, we are joined by Mr. Douglas Kemper. Doug is the Executive Director for the Colorado Water Congress. We are pleased to have him.

Here in the Committee room we have Mr. Ethan Lane, who is the Vice President of Government Affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). We welcome you.

We are also joined by Mr. Will Shafroth. Will is the President and CEO of the National Park Foundation, so this is a good day for you as well with passage of the Great American Outdoors Act.

Then we are also pleased to welcome Ms. Jess Turner, who is the Executive Director for the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR).

We will go in the order as I have introduced you. Again, my hope is that we will be able to get through the comments from all five of our witnesses this morning and then we might take a quick break to go vote. Hopefully we will and that will work with our timing. I would ask folks to try to keep your comments to about five minutes. Your full statements will be incorporated as part of the record, and then we will have an opportunity for engagement back and forth. Several of our colleagues will also be participating virtually, so there will be a lot of moving pieces here but I think we have all got this in the age of Zoom and Webex.

With that, let's begin with you, Mr. Hepler. Welcome to the Committee and nice to see you.

STATEMENT OF HON. KELLY R. HEPLER, SECRETARY, SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH AND PARKS, ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Mr. HEPLER. Good morning, Madam Chair and Ranking Member Manchin, members of the Committee. I do appreciate this opportunity to testify this morning and I have testimony this morning on behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. As you noted, I'm Secretary of Game, Fish and Parks in South Dakota, but also as you noted, Madam Chair, that I spent 35 years in Alaska and those were great years. We do have some mutual friends here—Mulder, Pat Carter and Rueben and others. You also were very gracious and had an intern named Maggie Hepler a number of years ago. My wife and I certainly appreciate the leadership you showed with my daughter. Thank you. But about five years ago I had the great opportunity to return back to my home State of South Dakota where I am now the Secretary.

As both Senators mentioned earlier this morning, we are certainly in challenging times and this is truly an understatement. The effects of COVID-19 are profoundly impacting the physical and mental well-being of our nation's citizens and the stability of our national and local economies. During this pandemic, our natural resources which provide for the health and well-being of the public are being relied on now more and more. The general public has increased its use of state-managed lands and waters at unprecedented levels for much needed outdoor recreation and relaxation. Americans increasingly are seeking nature on these state lands for comfort and healing. This level of public use is presenting new op-

portunities to reach new constituents and driving home the relevancy of state fish and wildlife agencies to a person's quality of life. As more people experience the proven health benefits of the outdoors and nature, many of them engage in activities that directly fund species and habitat conservation.

Hunting and fishing licenses, a lifeblood of state fish and wildlife agencies, depend on open lands, water and travel. License sales this year vary widely across the country. Resident fishing licenses are by far the standout. Compared to last year, national sales through April were just under about ten percent across the land. In South Dakota we've seen a 27 percent increase. Unfortunately this is coupled to an 18 percent decrease nationally on non-resident fishing license sales due to state-specific travel restrictions and regulations. And in some states, agencies must sell up to six times the number of resident licenses to cover the loss of revenue from non-resident license sales. Nowhere is this better illustrated, Madam Chair, than in Alaska where the Department of Fish and Game relies on non-resident license sales to fund a significant part of their budget. These sales are down 90 percent and, I repeat, 90 percent in the first half of 2020 compared to April 2019. Excise taxes from sales of hunting and fishing equipment provide another bright spot for conservation and state fish and wildlife agency budgets. Estimated sales of guns and ammo have increased by about 300 percent in the second half of FY 2020. Revenue generated from these taxes fund conservation projects directly benefiting hunters and recreational shooters. The sale of angling and gear and motor boat fuels and the resulting excise tax receipts have been robust since part of the state supports fish projects.

However, there's an unprecedented strain on state agency budgets and fiscal uncertainty is the norm. Mandatory reductions in spending authority, hiring freezes, stringent spending shrinkages and reduction or elimination of state, federal and general funds to state agencies are some of the fiscal challenges that they're now facing. Critical NGO partners also relied on for match generation have been devastated by this economic impact and they've also been put at risk—grants, contracts, cooperative agreements that we have with these partners. And even though funding is performing pretty well, none of us know for certain what's going to happen this fall and what that means as far as our hunting licenses.

Congress has recognized this increased necessity for conservation funding, and I thank the Senate for the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. Outstanding work, Senators. This will create jobs by addressing the deferred maintenance backlog to federal land managers as well as help fund the statewide program's Land and Water Conservation Fund, that, of course, as Senator Manchin noted, this Act passed the House yesterday and congratulations to all. It's going to provide some historic funding for many.

In South Dakota we partner with communities across the state to improve the quality of life by funding projects like swimming pools, playgrounds and hiking trails. These are the type of projects that keep small communities alive, although I'm concerned about the ability of these communities to build that make them necessary to match. We will continue to rise and meet the challenges of this

pandemic and look forward to working with the Congress to answer their needs. Indeed, state fish and wildlife agencies will be resilient, strong and ensuring the wise stewardship of fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of the current and future generations. We want to work with Congress to not only improve our financial security to rebuild and our state recreational infrastructure, but maybe it is important to bring hope to all those families that value the importance of getting outside. Thank you again, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to testify, I stand by for questions. Thank you, Madam.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hepler follows:]



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TESTIMONY OF KELLY R. HEPLER

On Behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing on COVID Impact on Public Lands
10am EDT, July 23, 2020

Good morning Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) to address the impacts of COVID-19 on state fish and wildlife agencies (state agencies) and the states' public lands. My name is Kelly Hepler, and I serve as the Secretary of the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department as well as the President of the Association. While I am a South Dakota native, prior to my current role I was the Assistant Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), a position I held beginning in 2010 as a Senior Policy Advisor to the Commissioner. I began my career as a fisheries biologist before moving into management and leadership roles, including as Director of the ADFG Division of Sport Fish. I was also a principal investigator of the Exxon Valdez oil spill and supervised the development, defense, and reporting of research findings.

The Association represents the collective interests of the state agencies. Since 1902, the Association has worked to support these member agencies and assist in promoting and facilitating science-based resource management in collaboration with public and private partners. All 50 states are members as well as 11 Canadian provinces and territories. We thank you for your ongoing attention to COVID-19 impacts and for passing legislation to assist our nation's citizens, businesses, communities, state agencies, and health care providers with managing the public health and economic crises created by the COVID-19 global pandemic. My testimony today highlights some of the challenges the state agencies have experienced to date, with much uncertainty for the future, and a few of the innovations discovered through this time of change.

The COVID-19 pandemic has crushing financial effects that is gripping our nation and having a profound effect on the physical and mental health and well-being of our citizens, access to our natural resources, and state and national economies. We respectfully request your consideration for inclusion in the next package of coronavirus relief assistance, provisions for state agencies that would provide temporary and partial fiscal relief from nonfederal match requirements for apportioned federal grants under the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs (WSFR) and other provisions that under the current economic hardships adversely affect states ability to deliver fish, wildlife, and habitat management activities and projects and programs that support sportsmen, sportswomen, and the outdoor recreation economy.

Fiscal Roller Coaster of Uncertainty

The current global pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19 and the necessary actions to safeguard our citizens is sending states' and our nation's economies into a downward spiral. Stay at home and safer at home orders, travel restrictions, mandatory quarantines, and reduced tourism continue to drive down state revenues stemming from the loss of sales and hospitality taxes, tourism, job losses, and an overall decrease in consumer spending.

Hunting and fishing license sales, one of the primary sources of nonfederal match for apportioned federal grants and the lifeblood of state agencies, depend on open lands, water, and travel. License sales this year have varied across the states, with some facing stark downturns and others seeing instability followed by a seasonal increase in the number of licenses sold. However, further exploration of the data is required beyond total number of licenses sold. Resident license sales have been the strongest category among state agencies, but it remains to be seen whether early purchasers or new users are driving the numbers, and whether a trend exists that can be maintained. Non-resident licenses can generate up to six times the revenue of resident purchases, and the loss of non-resident hunters due to COVID-19 restrictions is dire for several states, none more so than Alaska. With COVID-19 on the rise in some states, prospects for the fall hunting season are uncertain – whether people will buy licenses, whether nonresident hunters will be affected by travel restrictions or whether they will be able to utilize a tag or permit remains unclear.

Regardless of license revenue available, some state agencies are experiencing mandatory reductions in spending authority, some are seeing significant reductions in state general revenue that they would normally receive, and there are significant spending restrictions in place in many states. The highly volatile stock market has produced a significant drop in annual interest earnings that are available for withdrawal. State agencies that normally would use interest earnings to meet their nonfederal match requirements are coming up woefully short, some by millions of dollars. Volunteer and partner activities that would normally generate sources of nonfederal match such as hunter education classes, fish hatchery management, and volunteers on species and habitat projects are not occurring due to necessary precautions for physical and social distancing, causing additional nonfederal match losses. These challenges have compounded the economic impacts on state agency budgets, further exacerbating the financial challenges ahead.

While some state agencies' fiscal accounts that are dedicated to fish, wildlife, and habitat conservation activities, and pay for staff and constituent programs and services, are protected from diversion for other uses, others are not. The important nonfederal match revenue accounts which are not protected from diversion are expected to be swept by the state for other uses, further reducing the funds state agencies have available for nonfederal match, balancing their budgets, maintaining jobs, and fulfilling their missions. As a result, state agencies are executing freezes on hiring, contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements, which is impacting conservation partners, habitat management work, research and restoration activities, capacity to deliver conservation, and threatening completion of planned projects and programs. Some state agencies were required to redirect a portion of their staff to COVID-19 tracing and processing unemployment claims – further straining the agencies' staff capacity. Many states have large

deficits and expect them to grow, or even double, in the next state fiscal year. Further, it is expected that state legislatures will reduce state agencies' spending authority again in upcoming budget cycles, similar to actions taken during the economic recession in 2007-2009. During previous periods of economic hardship, state agencies that were not as hard hit by declines in revenues and were capable of making their nonfederal match requirements for apportioned grants were not granted commensurate spending authority to do so; in fact, for many their spending authority was reduced to levels that were similar to other sister state agencies. We are witnessing that now. For more examples of state agencies' fiscal challenges, please see the attachment to this testimony.

Federal excise tax revenue on the sale of firearms and ammunition that are deposited into the Wildlife Restoration Program is expected to rise based on sales estimates, and Sport Fish Restoration receipts declined during the months of March and April but have since rebounded while state agencies' sources of nonfederal match revenues for these grant dollars are uncertain at best. Currently, the federal:nonfederal match ratio for all of these grants is 75:25, but the current financial crises and COVID-19 associated challenges are creating financial challenges for state agencies over the next several fiscal years. With the current trajectory, some state agencies expect to have difficulty meeting the required 25% nonfederal match requirements for these grants which will result in a loss of jobs and reductions in programs, public services, and important habitat management activities that are already strained. In fact, several states have already instituted temporary furloughs of state agency staff in an effort to reduce overall state spending, and some grant deliverables are unable to be accomplished, are greatly delayed, or have to be revised creating additional uncertainties for accomplishing the state agencies' missions and commitments to the public and creating many challenges for completing their planned grant deliverables.

Proposed Nonfederal Match Financial Relief

Financial relief from the current nonfederal match requirements is needed for all WSFR apportioned grants to state agencies in order to continue to meet the needs of hunters, recreational target shooters, fishers, boaters, and wildlife observers and photographers as well as their state agency missions. Financial hardships for the state agencies are expected to continue for several fiscal years, negatively impacting their ability to meet nonfederal match requirements for WSFR grants in FY2020 and FY2021 and possibly beyond. To enable state agencies to continue to serve the sportsmen and sportswomen's conservation community and support the outdoor recreation economy, we are seeking a temporary reduction in the nonfederal match requirements for WSFR apportioned grants to 90:10 for FY2020 and FY2021, provide the state agencies with additional time to obligate and spend the grants, and eliminate safety margin penalties during the same fiscal years.

Benefits of Relief

With your support, these proposed temporary changes in statutes will provide much needed financial relief from current nonfederal match requirement levels which will save existing state jobs, jobs associated with contractual obligations, and jobs generated through cooperative grants and agreements and subgrants with conservation nongovernmental organizations and colleges and universities. It will also create new jobs.

This temporary financial relief will allow states to meet the reduced nonfederal match requirements for their WSFR grants and spend these funds as Congress, hunters, recreational target shooters, fishers, boaters, and the manufacturers of those products intended. This will prevent reversions of grant funds and loss of outdoor recreational opportunities. Further, it will allow state agencies to implement projects as planned and create new jobs associated with building and maintaining recreational and natural infrastructure such as recreational target shooting ranges and habitat restoration efforts. In turn, these actions will continue to support the nation's outdoor recreation participation and benefit the outdoor recreation economy, which accounts for 2.2% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Lost Conservation Opportunities for Fish, Wildlife, and Their Habitats

Fish and wildlife conservation work has been drastically impacted due to the financial impacts of the current COVID-19 crisis, but also by the challenges arising from necessary health and safety precautions. Across the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has required agencies to alter their field work and associated protocols to protect the health and safety of staff and project volunteers. Many state agencies have chosen or were mandated to cancel volunteer work and few were able to hire seasonal staff for the summer field season. For example, in Delaware, volunteers are normally utilized to manage and deter the recreating public from disturbing nesting shorebirds, wading birds, and colonial nesting birds, but were unable to perform these in-kind volunteer duties out of health concerns for the volunteers and their risks of contracting the coronavirus. In rural states like Nebraska, volunteers are critical to fire management and response. South Carolina utilizes volunteers for sea turtle monitoring, many of which are in high-risk health categories. The total loss of this vital source of in-kind match jeopardizes state agencies' ability to meet their nonfederal match requirements for State Wildlife Grant projects and continue with important conservation and restoration actions on the ground.

Social distancing and safety requirements for agency staff and volunteers have resulted in cancelled or modified schedules for necessary field work, from inability to procure basic supplies to limited fleet capacity due to one person per vehicle requirements. Initial outright bans on field work were followed by stringent protocols developed by state agencies, some requiring approval before reinitiating even basic responsibilities. Much field work was simply cancelled or continues to be delayed, as it cannot be conducted safely by professionals working alone. This applies to a variety of work from capture and collaring of large mammals to certain types of monitoring surveys. In Michigan, the Department faced a 3-month delay for vessels to begin field sampling in the Great Lakes, likely resulting in the loss of vital data sets and long-term trend continuity that is used to inform fisheries management decisions.

Some state agency hatcheries rely on egg takes and spawning to maintain population levels and restore declining species, without which revenues from angler licenses would be devastated. Many state agencies were forced to cancel or limit certain hatchery work due to safety precautions and policies. All spawning was cancelled in South Dakota, while egg takes with broodstock netting were cancelled in Arkansas, including that of striped bass, a key sportfish species. Kentucky, Mississippi, Colorado and New York among others with limited hatchery operations, will experience reduced fish populations for the near future. Modifications to hatchery work procedures are resulting in increased expenditures stemming from single person

vehicle requirements and stocking requirements among other complications. Much needed fish hatchery improvements have been cancelled in states such as Washington and Arizona due to lack of funding, further compromising fisheries management. Hatchery and fisheries work often relies heavily on volunteer staff, without which agencies are further strained for capacity and in-kind match generation, and many volunteers were unable to perform normal duties this year due to COVID-19.

Hunter Education Challenges and Innovation

An increase in firearm and ammunition purchases have made education more important than ever while state agencies deal with the challenges of conducting hunter education and safety certification courses with health and safety restrictions in place. These courses typically rely on volunteer instructors. Safety concerns resulted in the postponement of all in-person courses by many state agencies, and at least one cancelled all hunter education classes for the year. This is yet another loss of volunteer, in-kind match hours, but equally critical is the loss in number of students and potential hunters. State agencies have attempted to mitigate this through a temporary suspension or delay of in-person testing requirements and moving, at least temporarily, to online only courses. Safety concerns have created opportunities for innovation, with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources exploring remote handling tests and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation finding enormous success with a new online hunter education program. As of July, New York is half-way to doubling their annual average of completed courses and based on early participation information the new online learning, may provide opportunities to better reach underserved demographics through nontraditional learning environments. When the Nevada Department of Wildlife was forced to cancel all of their in-person, new hunter classes out of precautions for health and human safety, staff created a series of videos of the courses' content. It has grown into an on-demand, online virtual classroom that is being utilized by more individuals than would otherwise be able to take the in-person classes and is increasingly reaching citizens from diverse backgrounds.

COVID-19 Threatens Access to Public Lands

During the COVID-19 pandemic many federal and local lands, ranging from National Parks to community parks were closed to protect human health and safety. In some instances, state lands and facilities also closed to protect human health and to comply with State policies. Some state lands modified operations to allow some continued public access while taking steps to reduce the risk of disease transmission among the visiting public and to proactively manage potential transmission hot spots. However, many state wildlife management areas as well as fishing lakes and ponds remained open. Now more than ever before, Americans increasingly are utilizing state lands and waters that are close to home during these difficult times for physical distancing and exercise and for their mental health and well-being. State agencies across the country have reported repeatedly throughout this pandemic that these state lands and waters have witnessed unprecedented use by the public. Many of these visitors are new to state wildlife management areas, which provides state agencies with a welcomed opportunity to educate and serve new constituents.

Clearly, outdoor recreation is growing in necessity and popularity, but there are hurdles to maintaining this public access. Overwhelming numbers of people cause overcrowding concerns. Insufficient social distancing by visitors creates public health anxieties and the increased risk of

disease transmission, which could jeopardize continued access to these public lands and waters. This has required state agencies to redirect additional staff capacity and expenses to managing public access challenges such as social distancing reminders, prevent overcrowding, and manage traffic congestion on state lands and waters. We ask the public to please practice #ResponsibleRecreation when enjoying the great outdoors. We remain concerned that the rising number of COVID-19 cases in some states coupled with insufficient social distancing could be cause for future public access restrictions and closures. We know the public needs these outdoor spaces for physical and mental health and well-being now more than ever, and state agencies will do what they can to maintain public access, but we need the public's help to do so.

Further, while state agencies are excited about the public's increased use of their lands and waters, the increased use of state lands and waters is straining the state infrastructure that supports it, and state agencies have lost millions of dollars of operating capital. State agencies with state parks systems such as Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska and others have experienced sizable financial losses from a loss of park fees, service fees, lodging fees, and other sources of revenue. These deficits cannot be overcome this state fiscal year and will be carried forward into the next, and the impacts will be felt even longer. Unfortunately, these fiscal deficits prevent completion of critical maintenance and repair projects, some of which will affect the public's ability to use certain state lands and waters or their associated amenities. Some have closed, some may have to close, and others may be able to offer only partial access and amenities if funding is not available to fund the growing list of maintenance and repairs.

Social distancing requirements also have complicated state and federal aquatic invasive species (AIS) management and control efforts across the country. If left unchecked, AIS will spread within a waterbody and, through recreational boating and other water sports activities, be inadvertently spread to other water bodies. The costs of controlling AIS are escalating every year for state and federal agencies, and many are identified as threats to states' species of greatest conservation need, threaten important fish and wildlife habitats, and are most often the cause of public access closures on water bodies. Every year local, state, and private water bodies across the country are closed in order to perform control and management activities because AIS have restricted recreational boating and fishing access. Once a waterbody is infected with AIS, eradication is impossible and managing the spread of AIS becomes a new, expensive ongoing operational program for state and federal agencies, private landowners, and others. It's vitally important that outdoor enthusiasts continue to practice good watersports hygiene by cleaning, draining, and drying all aspects of their vessels and watersports equipment before entering and upon leaving any public or private pond, lake, or reservoir to prevent the spread of AIS.

Public Lands and Waters: Places of Respite and Despair

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have unprecedented, harmful impacts on our citizens, our health care professionals, our first responders, and our conservation law enforcement officers. Many of our neighbors, friends, families, and community members in great numbers continue to seek the great outdoors as places for relief – places to exercise, decompress, breathe deeply and freely, enjoy life and family, and as a vital place of mental and emotional healing and restoration. Being out of doors and reconnecting with nature seems to improve our individual resiliency and ability to push onward. Our state agencies embrace this opportunity to connect with new

constituents and increase our relevancy to and opportunity for future communication and engagement with these citizens.

Sadly, state lands are not always a place of respite for some of our citizens, and some of the impacts of COVID-19 that our state agency staff are witnessing are worse than we ever imagined. Job stresses and losses, financial challenges, the death of a loved one, an emotionally demanding profession, and other aspects COVID-19 are taking a disconcerting toll on our citizens. State agencies' conservation law enforcement (CLE) officers increasingly find themselves engaged in suicide interventions with people seeking to commit suicide on state lands. Unfortunately, they also are responding to an increase in the number of suicides committed on state lands. Further, with pools closed due to COVID-19 and summer temperatures rising, people are increasingly swimming in dangerous and restricted bodies of water which is resulting in an increase in adult drownings. Our CLE officers are responding to an increasing number of search and rescue missions but more and more transition to search and recovery. The growing number of lives lost and the associated sorrow is taking a huge toll on the mental health and well-being of our communities, the CLE officers responding to these tragedies, and to the state agencies as a whole. We welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with health care professionals to improve the mental health and resiliency of our citizens and to save lives.

Furthermore, there is an increased demand on CLE officers who are dispatched to state lands, waters, boat ramps, and elsewhere to manage traffic and overcrowding, provide public education and safety services, provide social distancing reminders, interventions, and emergency responses. They are also being asked to provide support to local law enforcement efforts, to provide a police presence as a deterrence, and dispatched to manage COVID-19 testing traffic. This increases the strain on existing CLE staff capacity across the country at a time when many existing CLE officer vacancies will continue due to hiring freezes or insufficient state financial resources needed to hire more officers. These COVID-19 related expenses are a growing part of CLE divisions' budgets, and they are not eligible to apply for federal grants to seek reimbursement during declared emergencies such as this for their time and COVID-19 related response expenses. This downward spiral further erodes the capacity and morale of state agencies' CLE divisions. Congress could help by making CLE divisions eligible for the reimbursement of costs associated with responses to emergency declarations.

Delayed Stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund Projects

It was recently brought to our attention that the National Park Service is no longer performing Tribal consultations on Stateside Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) projects. They are unable to initiate and/or complete required National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 and/or National Environmental Protection Act compliance on Stateside LWCF projects. We suspect this is related to impacts to the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of available staff to conduct consultations, although the state agencies have not received a formal justification for delayed Tribal consultations. Consequently, there are many projects across the country that cannot receive funding or begin construction because of these delays. Other states will not be able to complete high priority projects already under way, and funds already spent on those projects will be lost at a time when state fiscal resources are precious and scarce. Curiously, it is also our understanding that the US Fish and Wildlife Service currently is not experiencing similar delays

with their LWCF projects. To help states continue to implement outdoor recreation projects, maintain and create jobs, and alleviate the current state fiscal pinch, we recommend Congress consider taking the following actions to provide relief:

- Temporarily reduce the LWCF Stateside program nonfederal match requirement from 50% to no more than 20% to provide financial flexibility to states and small communities who otherwise will be unable to meet the nonfederal match requirement and will have to forego use of the LWCF Stateside programs.
- Temporarily allow the use of LWCF Stateside program funds for states' deferred maintenance and habitat stewardship needs on state-LWCF lands and projects to maintain outdoor recreation opportunities. Also, allow states to utilize up to 10% of the annual apportionment for administration purposes.
- Modify Section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act to allow for disposal of structures, amenities, and property that has met or exceeded its useful life. Currently, all Fund-assisted property must be used and retained for public outdoor recreation uses in perpetuity without any consideration or exception provided for surplus/disposal if the community or environmental conditions change, or if the lifespan or useful life of the structures, amenities, or property funded by the LWCF have been met or exceeded. These perpetual obligations to maintain outdoor recreational lands, no matter the cost or lifespan of the improvement, are financially and logistically unrealistic, particularly for small or shrinking rural communities.

Maintaining Public Access by Investing in State Outdoor Recreation and Public Safety Infrastructure

Investments in fish, wildlife, and habitat restoration and outdoor recreation infrastructure generate up to 33 jobs per million dollars invested, as demonstrated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The outdoor recreation economy generates \$778 billion in economic activity, which is 2.2% of the Gross Domestic Product according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis and was one of the fastest growing sectors of our economy before COVID-19. Investing in programs and infrastructure that support outdoor recreation activities at the state and federal levels are a wise investment. It creates local non-exportable jobs while restoring fish and wildlife species to keep common species common and recover declining species before protections of the Endangered Species Act are warranted, reducing regulatory uncertainty. Habitat restoration provides benefits to our citizens by improving water quality and quantity, restoring forest health, improving air quality, combating destructive invasive species, and providing additional outdoor recreation opportunities, all of which creates jobs and fuels the economy. Additionally, healthy habitats also improve both urban and rural communities' resiliency to wildfires, droughts, floods, hurricanes, and other natural disasters.

Over the decades states 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 with nature, and more. For years, many state agencies have tried unsuccessfully to obtain state general funds for deferred maintenance expenses in order to keep these lands, waters, facilities, and infrastructure functioning for society. In some cases, these maintenance issues are imperative to protecting the public's safety and protecting property. Collectively, the cost of these existing "shovel-ready" state maintenance

needs have grown to billions of dollars. The longer we wait to make these repairs, the more likely a catastrophic event will occur, or these facilities will be forced to close which will hurt local communities and outdoor recreation economies. Addressing these state maintenance needs creates jobs on par with deferred maintenance projects on federal lands and waters, would support local businesses and contractors, and help stabilize and grow the outdoor recreation economy for the future. These projects would improve Americans' quality of life, their experiences outdoors, and access to outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands. To further jump start state and local economies, we respectfully request Congress consider providing grants to state agencies to address the following immediate state outdoor recreation infrastructure maintenance backlogs and needs in the next economic stimulus package:

- Address maintenance backlogs of state fish and aquatic species hatcheries which support the restoration of federal and state listed species as well as recreationally important species. Many of these facilities are over 50 years old and need new water wells drilled, energy efficiency upgrades, water quantity management systems, water quality treatment improvements, temperature regulating mechanisms, renovation of associated facilities, and more.
- Repair and rehabilitate public fishing piers, boat ramps, courtesy docks, marinas, parking lots, and associated public facilities to keep America fishing and boating.
- Repair, rebuild, and restore dangerous and degrading bridges and dams, water and habitat management structures of lakes and reservoirs, breakwaters, roads, and other state infrastructure that is critical to protect public safety, reduce flooding risks, restore habitat, maintain public access, and protect life and property.
- Repair, replace, and renovate water control structures, levees, dykes, and culverts to improve the management of water and wildlife habitats, reduce flooding and property loss, and reduce habitat losses from extended periods of flooding that are destroying critical outdoor recreation areas and habitats.
- Repair and upgrade building and maintenance facilities to improve operational efficiencies and in wildlife education and nature centers to better meet the needs of the public, improve energy efficiency, repair roofs, replace HVAC systems, and repair decades-old buildings.
- Fund facilities that provide for native terrestrial and aquatic plant production, which is used for fish and wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement projects.
- Fund repairs and maintenance of critical fish and wildlife monitoring and research equipment.
- Fund state assessments for Americans with Disabilities Act compliance and the rebuilding of compliant infrastructure on state wildlife management areas, parks, and other outdoor recreation facilities to improve access for all Americans.
- Repair and rebuild campgrounds, trails, roads, and associated facilities on state agency lands.

Moreover, by enacting the *Great American Outdoors Act* (S.3422, H.R.7092), Congress will create jobs by addressing the deferred maintenance backlogs for federal land management agencies as well as through the Stateside Programs of the LWCF in the future. We thank you for your dedicated, bipartisan efforts to pass the *Great American Outdoors Act* (S.3422), which is supported by diverse coalitions and interests across the nation and will help address the federal land management agencies' deferred maintenance backlogs. It also will continue the Stateside Programs of the LWCF, which provide important opportunities for state park agencies to provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities to the public. Passage of this Act is historic, and on

behalf of the state parks agencies like South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks that utilizes the LWCF Stateside programs to benefit our citizens, I thank you.

Congress can help local communities, states, and the federal economies recover from the financial devastation created by the COVID-19 pandemic by prioritizing the above investments in natural resources restoration, and outdoor recreation while benefiting our citizens and future generations. We respectfully request you include in any economic stimulus package these investments in state and federal outdoor recreation infrastructure as well as provide temporary, partial relief from nonfederal match requirements.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, for considering our recommendations, and for your support of state agencies, public lands, and the outdoor recreation economy. We look forward to working with members of this committee to overcome these national crises while building a stronger outdoor recreation economy for the future. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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Examples of States Experiencing Financial Hardships and in Need of Nonfederal Match Relief

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered the financial conditions, spending authorities, day-to-day responsibilities, and workloads of state fish and wildlife agencies (state agencies). During these unprecedented times, precious state resources that normally would be used as nonfederal match to federal grants were lost, diminished, or not generated at all and at no fault of the state agencies. Loss of in-kind match on habitat field projects, fisheries projects, and hunter education classes is common as is the significant loss of revenue that would normally be generated by various types of non-resident hunting and fishing licenses. Loss of state energy royalties and the loss of interest generated on financial accounts also have diminished financial resources normally available to fund staff and state agency operations. Mandatory reductions in spending authority, hiring freezes, stringent spending restrictions, and reduction or elimination of state general fund revenues to the state agencies are some of the fiscal challenges they face going into the next state fiscal biennium.

Below are a few examples of how state agencies have been affected financially and operationally by the COVID-19 pandemic and why they seek fiscal relief from nonfederal match to grants administered under the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR), which includes State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Alabama

- The Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources relies heavily on state license revenues to pay for their conservation law enforcement (CLE) officers and operations as well as providing the vital state match portions to leverage Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson federal funds to adequately fund all the other fish and wildlife conservation responsibilities and services of the Division.
- There are insufficient state funds to cover the year-over-year growing financial shortfalls of Alabama's CLE needs, and the unfilled staff vacancies continue to grow. In fact, the number of CLE officers within the Division is at an historic low. They have the same number of CLEs today that they did in 1971, which represents a 35% decline and leaves more than 25 unfilled CLE officer positions.
- These historically low staffing levels occur at the worst time possible – when Alabama's wildlife management areas and recreational target shooting ranges are experiencing unprecedented high levels of public use during the COVID-19 pandemic, and more CLEs than the Division has are needed to manage over-crowding, assist with educating the public, and provide vital public safety functions. Additionally, CLEs are providing public safety assistance to local law enforcement jurisdictions that are also overwhelmed with overcrowding issues, which further stresses the Division's limited CLE resources.

- Further, the Division is challenged to make its nonfederal match for their Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration and State Wildlife Grant projects, and partners' in-kind and monetary donation match contributions are equally constrained, unable to offset the deficit. These fiscal difficulties are further exacerbated by a state budget cycle that requires all nonfederal match to be secured two years in advance, making recoveries from unexpected expenditures and resource challenges like responding to the COVID-19 pandemic extremely challenging.

Alaska

- The lives of Alaskans directly depend on the state's fish, wildlife, and natural resources. Alaska's residents rely on subsistence hunting far more than those in any other state, but the budget of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game are highly dependent on hunting and fishing license sales.
- For Alaska, the majority of this revenue is from the sale of non-resident licenses. These are primarily generated by anglers and hunters within the tourism industry, which is now all but nonexistent and potentially facing a dire future. License and tag sales for nonresidents in the first half of 2020 are down 90% compared to sales through the first half of April 2019. The resulting loss totals 60% of the budget for the Department.
- A substantial portion of sales are non-resident fishing licenses sold to customers on cruises, an industry in the midst of a global shut down. Nonresident fishing licenses account for nearly 70% of the license revenue in a normal year and provides about 50% of the funding for the Division of Sport Fish within the Department of Fish and Game. The substantial loss of nonresident anglers in 2020 will have a devastating impact on license revenue and could result in a revenue loss of over \$9 million.
- Alaska would have to sell up to five times the annual number of resident licenses to make up for these revenue shortfalls, which isn't likely since nonresident license revenue comprises approximately 60% of the department's revenue. These are not budgetary shortfalls that can simply be addressed by state legislature moving money around. Up to 90% of Alaska's unrestricted state general fund relies on oil and gas revenues, which are projected to be less than half of expected yearly numbers.

Delaware

- Safety margins are used in WSFR grant management to determine how much apportioned funds can be rolled forward and obligated the following fiscal year or must be reverted to the USFWS. Ongoing staff vacancies coupled with a hiring cap and restrictions in the use of contract employees has challenged the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife to fill and pay for these positions with grant funds. This lack of staff has jeopardized the Division's safety margins and increased their risks for reverting sportsmen's conservation dollars to the USFWS.
- Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has required the Division to alter their field work and associated protocols to protect the health and safety of agency staff and project volunteers. Consequently, the agency is currently unable to utilize volunteers' time as in-kind, nonfederal match assistance on State Wildlife Grant (SWG) projects, as well as WSFR funding associated with their Hunter Education Program. Volunteers are normally utilized to manage and deter the recreating public from disturbing nesting shorebirds, wading birds, and colonial nesting birds – species whose nesting success are particularly sensitive to human and vehicle disturbance. The total loss of this vital source of in-kind match jeopardizes the

Division's ability to meet their nonfederal match requirements for SWG projects. Delaware's Hunter Education Program utilizes at least 50 volunteer instructors to deliver 11 different programs to the public to educate hunters in the safe and proficient use of firearms and to promote knowledge in wildlife identification, management and conservation. Each year these volunteer instructors offer a minimum of 35 classes to over 1000 students statewide contributing over \$20,000 in in-kind services as match. The loss of this in-kind match jeopardizes the Division's ability to meet their nonfederal match requirements for WSFR Hunter Education projects.

Georgia

- Georgia's Division of Wildlife Resources received an 18% budget reduction, totaling \$4.1 million. The majority of this funding was budgeted for capital outlay projects and would have been used as match for high priority WSFR projects.
- Further, the pandemic prevented the division from conducting in-person hunter education programs this year, which resulted in the loss of in-kind nonfederal match which the agency depends on for meeting nonfederal match requirements and future programs.
- Aquatic education revenue needed to support Georgia's Go Fish Education Center operation is down nearly 100% since March. The COVID-19 pandemic is the sole driver of this year's 35% loss in Center revenue.
- Any further budget cuts, loss of in-kind match, or unexpected expenses will further complicate the division's ability to meet their required nonfederal match for grants.

Illinois

- Non-resident hunting licenses account for more than \$15 million in revenue for Illinois (fully half of the state's hunting license receipts), with \$6.9 million coming from non-resident archery deer hunting permits. Illinois faces the potential loss of non-resident deer hunting license sales this fall if the pandemic continues and travel remains restricted or reduced.
- Every state property in Illinois closed almost immediately due to COVID-19, from March 15-May 29, causing a loss of \$1.5 million in camping revenue.
- Illinois currently is near its legislatively mandated headcount cap with many essential positions still remaining to be filled. Additionally, a hiring freeze has been instituted that shuts off hiring for all but the most critical positions.
- The Illinois DNR faces an uncertain budget position, as many of its non-federal and non-license revenue funds are subject to statutory transfers to the state's general fund, potentially reducing funds available to the Department.

Indiana

- Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife of the Department of Natural Resources will experience a 15% budget cut on both general and dedicated funding like their sister state agencies, creating serious threats of reversion. This budget cut will last through the next biennium into 2022, with implications for the following biennium as well.
- The state legislature is highly likely to sweep all revenue accounts that are not protected from diversion, reducing the state revenue the division has available to meet nonfederal match needs.
- A hiring freeze has been issued as one of the strategies for the state to make the 15% budget cut. Currently the Division has 38 staff positions in the division unfilled, representing a 14%

total staff vacancy with no path forward. Staffing is down even more when considering research programs, seasonal field work, and fisheries work which rely heavily on volunteers that are not able to provide in-kind volunteer time as match.

Michigan

- All Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) staff began teleworking on March 16, during which human health and social distancing considerations precluded fish and wildlife fieldwork from being completed on conservation projects and programs. While fieldwork resumed on May 28, the necessary delay created fieldwork backlogs and project completion challenges.
- On March 30, 2020, Governor Whitmer issued [Executive Directive 2020-4](#), which implemented a hiring freeze for all state Departments, leaving staff vacancies for the immediate and foreseeable future. The State of Michigan also has implemented a one day a week temporary layoff for 10 weeks this summer. This temporary layoff is scheduled to end July 24th.
- On March 30, 2020, Governor Whitmer also issued [Executive Directive 2020-3](#) and states “state government must take action now to limit its discretionary spending, to help ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic does as little harm as possible to both the public health and the fiscal health of this state.” This means focusing fiscal and human resources on health and human safety needs and COVID-19 responses above other priorities unless otherwise mandated or required, which also complicates the delivery of fish and wildlife conservation projects and public services.
- Many fish and wildlife conservation projects are completed through grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements with conservation organizations, academia, and specialized expertise. Unfortunately, most of these grants, contracts, and agreements are paused and not being funded until further notice. This jeopardizes the implementation of future projects funded by Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson programs that are normally completed in cooperation with partners.
- One of the unseen risks to accomplishing conservation work is the impact of macro scale state budget pressures. In Michigan, there are critical conservation programs, like certain invasive species work and most significantly, our law enforcement work is largely supported by state general fund revenues -- a source of revenue which is experiencing catastrophic decline and nearly un-precedented demand. Should those general fund dollars leave the MDNR’s budget as a result of the need to balance the state budget, those cuts will have to be back-filled with mix of user generated revenues, a significant portion of which will be state game and fish dollars and WSFR funds. Relieving the nonfederal match requirement will provide critical flexibility to ensure that the (hopefully) temporary declines in general fund revenues do not have permanent negative impact on critical conservation programs and services.
- States like Michigan are facing a dilemma where providing the necessary funds for nonfederal match could mean lacking the personnel capacity to implement funded projects.
- Reversion of federal dollars will set state agencies in a vicious cycle of lost revenue and conservation opportunities, and in Michigan, this cycle has already begun. Due to social distancing requirements and public health considerations, all egg-takes for fish hatcheries were cancelled. Anglers rely on these hatcheries to provide seasonal stocking, and less fish means less angling opportunities in the future and less license revenue generated.

- These limitations and unforeseen challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic will affect services to the public and fish and wildlife conservation efforts in Michigan for years to come.

Nebraska

- The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission lost over \$1 million due to the closure of non-resident turkey hunting. That means approximately 7,200 less certified hunters paying into state conservation and comparable reductions in the state's federal funds to be apportioned under the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Program in the next fiscal year.
- All camping in the state was closed for months due to the pandemic. Camping fees, one of the main funding sources for the Commission for their state parks program, are behind \$2.5-3 million dollars as of the end of May, as are lodging fees. These funding shortfalls coupled with additional unexpected pandemic related expenses are putting additional strains on existing state revenues, reducing the resources available to meet nonfederal match requirements.
- With the wide-scale closure of activities under directed health measures, public use of every state-owned property skyrocketed with people wanting to get out of their homes and get outdoors. More staff were redirected to these properties to assist with social distancing, traffic management, regulation compliance and overcrowding concerns – increasing the strain on state funds. Public health restrictions resulted in the necessary reduction of volunteers for various state agency programs and projects. This has drastically decreased available in-kind match across all states, but Nebraska in particular relies on research and field work volunteers to generate in-kind match for their grants. This loss represents a substantial reduction in in-kind match that is no longer available and adversely affects the agency's ability to meet nonfederal match requirements.

Oklahoma

- Oklahoma's state budget relies significantly on oil and gas revenues for the bulk of its general fund revenue. The drop in this revenue coupled with a highly volatile stock market has had significant economic impacts on the state budget and funds.
- The economic downturn guarantees the state legislature will seek to sweep any non-protected funding sources, exacerbating the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's FY 2021 budget deficit. This deficit is the direct result of the current pandemic, caused by significant loss of interest on investments, stock market swings, and loss of nonresident license revenues each of which are critical to meeting the budget needs of the department.
- The Department's Lifetime License Trust Fund, from which annual interest earnings are withdrawn, is utilized to meet nonfederal match requirements for federal grants and make up department budget shortfalls in recent years from the ongoing decline in annual license sales. In the early months of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department lost nearly \$11 million in its stock market investments, thus resulting in an FY 2021 budget that is over \$7 million less than FY 2020. If conditions don't improve or relief is not provided, the Department will be unable to meet its nonfederal match requirements much less maintain its grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements with partners to sustain important projects, programs, management activities, research, and constituent services.

Washington

- At the Governor's request, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife submitted a \$12.8 million cut for their FY21 budget, representing a 15% reduction in State General Fund spending authority, resulting in the postponement and potential cancellations of projects dedicated to restoring state species of greatest conservation need, and lost opportunities to restore imperiled species before protections of the Endangered Species Act are warranted.
- Further budget implications include reduced funding for fish barrier analysis and mapping that benefits salmon populations, listed Southern Resident Killer Whales, and other fisheries as well as reductions in aquatic invasive species mitigation, the latter of which are one of the most critical threats to the health of Washington's aquatic habitats and fisheries. Dire fish hatchery improvements have been cancelled, further straining state recreational and commercial fisheries infrastructure.
- With multi-billion-dollar state budget shortfalls predicted over the next several years, the Department is planning deeper budget cuts for the next biennium, and the Department will be forced to further reduce services and alter project timelines, which will adversely affect the public and their conservation partners for years to come.
- The Department, like many other state fish and wildlife agencies across the country, is currently under a hiring freeze as well as an equipment and contract freeze.
- Department capacity challenges are further exacerbated by mandatory furloughs and redirected resources that are not protected from diversion. Through at least July 25, the majority of Department staff will be furloughed one day a week, with a voluntary furlough offered in addition. The Department will continue to furlough staff one day per month through November 2020. The hiring and contract freezes coupled with existing Department vacancies will adversely impact the Department's ability to deliver conservation programs and public services in a timely manner.

West Virginia and Kansas

Estimated sales of guns and ammunition have increased by about 300% in the second fiscal quarter of FY2020. Revenues generated from these taxes are apportioned to the state agencies under the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Program, with a 25% nonfederal match requirement. However, 100% of project funding is provided up front by state agencies. Matching this estimated 300% increase is a concern for almost every state, but the state agencies of West Virginia and Kansas have expressed particular concern.

- The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources has seen a significant decline in hunting and fishing license revenue. The year to date loss in license revenue through June is almost \$1 million or about 3.5% of the Wildlife Resources Section's operating revenue. This lost revenue will impact the agency's ability to provide essential services to the public. This revenue deficit is due in part to declining numbers of nonresident anglers and turkey hunters. In addition, resident anglers were granted two months of free fishing privileges during the peak trout fishing period.
- In Kansas, the reduction and eventual termination of non-resident licenses sales likewise resulted in a \$2 million loss in revenue.

The CHAIRMAN. Very good, thank you, Mr. Hepler. We appreciate that.

Mr. Kemper, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS KEMPER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
COLORADO WATER CONGRESS**

Mr. KEMPER. Good morning. This is Doug Kemper. I am the Executive Director of the Colorado Water Congress. It serves as a principal voice of Colorado's water community. I'm also here representing the National Water Resources Association. I serve as the Chair of the State Executives. Most Western states have an organization somewhat similar to ours, and collectively we represent the majority of water use in the Western United States. Much of our water supply does come off of federal lands, parks and forests, and I'm here to talk a little bit about how COVID is affecting the water community—to cover five different topic areas. As we look at some of the COVID impacts, some—many are yet to be fully felt. There's some unevenness of impacts from place to place and type of water use but there is a general concern about the delays and funding for aging water infrastructure replacement.

First, on the safety and health of employees, our staff that work out in the field provide critical daily functions that cannot be performed remotely and there's a need for better preparedness. Most of us did not have a COVID scenario in our budgets as we were preparing for 2020. We do need stockpiles of PPE. We need some better messaging that water supply and water quality remain good and certainly, also, is stop flushing of flushable wipes has been a real problem for our wastewater folks. We do need better training and cross-training of operators. We already have a shortage of water and wastewater operators.

From infrastructure funding in my written materials there's being that they're from Idaho, that as commodity prices drop and the economy is falling, you know, construction costs are going up. This puts more pressure on local government's ability to fund and especially about concern of the ability to for state and local match for costs. Farmers need help and they need preparation. We need to invest in water infrastructure, and those investments return huge economic impacts. The irrigated ag needs to, in Western Colorado, really supports our local communities and it's very important. We need to, according to ASCE, we've got an \$84 billion gap in water and wastewater facility funding, \$45 billion in aging, high hazard dams, \$80 billion in levees.

We want to thank Senators Gardner and Bennett for their support for revenue stabilization assistance for Colorado. A recent survey by Colorado Municipal League shows that 80 percent of our municipalities expect a general fund shortfall of 20 percent in 2020. This is going to affect reducing critical services, staffing and controlled maintenance. We're seeing a precipitous drop in natural resource production and severance tax that comes from that. Sixty percent of that in Colorado is used for rural communities for funding. We're seeing an 81 percent decline in Colorado of severance tax and we've had, our state government has moved over \$45 million from its funds to balance the general budget that would normally have gone to water infrastructure funding. We're very con-

cerned about any work on shutoffs or federal mandates on shutoffs. I think that most of our local water providers are doing an excellent job of working with providers—with the customers to mitigate any kind of impacts there.

We've already mentioned the forest health, and that's a major concern. Aquatic nuisance species control, you know, we had 9,000 boat decontaminations this year and had 50, through this year, 5,200 from this time last year. And the forest to faucets programs, the resilient forests and the water source protection programs are all very important. Our special districts that were left out of the CARES Act and PPP programs need some help. These are really important districts that provide services where cities and counties cannot. You can look for more work there coming from special districts on mitigation for funding there.

In conclusion, the long-term plans are in flux really due to uncertainty of COVID, and that's really saying something for a water community that's constantly buffeted by weather and changes in the economy. Nobody's giving up. We generally have a very positive attitude, but we do need the Federal Government as a partner. I want to thank all of our Western Senators for their help and, as we're kicking around ideas in the water community, your names are all coming up very regularly and we really thank you for your support.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kemper follows:]



**United States Senate
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Full Committee Hearing to Examine the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Users of Public Lands,
Forests, and National Parks
July 23, 2020**

**Water-Related COVID-19 Impacts
Written Testimony of Douglas Kemper, Colorado Water Congress**

Guide to Written Testimony

These documents were developed as an ongoing collaboration among national and western professional organizations and inquiry of their individual members. Collectively, our organizations represent the vast majority of water use in the Western United States. Public lands, forests, and national parks are the principal water source satisfying the diverse needs of Western society and the ecosystem. Water is Life.

Western Water Issues Driven by COVID

Prepared by: National Water Resources Association and Colorado Water Congress

Results of April NWRA survey of Western water members

Specific comments from around the West

Colorado – Denver Water, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority, Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife

Idaho

Nevada

New Mexico

Washington

The Time is Now to Invest in Western Water Infrastructure – Let's Do It

Prepared by: National Water Resources Association and Family Farm Alliance

Op Ed – An investment in water infrastructure is a powerful investment in our economy, our communities, and our health.

Colorado Water Community COVID Survey Responses

Prepared by: Colorado Water Congress

Direct comments (minimally edited) from Colorado's water community regarding their COVID-related concerns and possible mitigations.

Colorado Water Conservation Board Budget Update

Prepared by: Colorado Water Conservation Board

Estimated 81% decline in severance tax collections. \$45.5 million directed from water project funding (Perpetual Base Account) to backfill State budget. Numerous important activities receiving State support will either be indefinitely delayed or have annual funding slowed to a 3-year allocation.

Forests, Watershed Health, and Water Supply

Letter to Senators Murkowski and Udall

Prepared by: Colorado Forest and Water Alliance

Request to fully fund U.S. Forest Service Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program

Letter to Hon. Jim Hubbard

Prepared by: Colorado Forest and Water Alliance

Express concerns about the impact of COVID-19 impacts on available Federal funding for programs that create resilient forests and watersheds.

Forest and Watershed Health in Post-COVID-19 Stimulus Planning

Prepared by: Colorado Forest and Water Alliance

COFWA strongly urges all funding entities, when appropriating stimulus and/or infrastructure dollars, to increase financial support for utility and water supply infrastructure projects that protect, repair, and improve water supply resilience.

COVID-19 Impacts on the Ground

Prepared by: Family Farm Alliance

Keys to success – willingness of state and federal authorities to provide flexibility while ensuring food safety and minimizing waste will be crucial in the future. Coordination among all will be vital.

What Are Special Districts?

Prepared by: National Special Districts Coalition

Visual summary of the function of the 30,000 special districts in the United States. Provided as a prelude to survey results that will soon be provided to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources by the National Special Districts Coalition. Survey will be completed on July 24. The purpose of the survey is to gather information on the revenue, expense, and operational impacts of COVID-19 on special districts.

Western Water Issues Driven by COVID

Prepared by the National Water Resources Association and the Colorado Water Congress

National Water Resources Association Member Survey Responses

What are your sectors top three risks? For the water supply sector the top three risks are:

Protecting staff:

Both municipal and agricultural water providers have staff that need to perform critical daily operational and maintenance functions. Many of these functions cannot be done remotely. A shortage of workers due to localized outbreak could have major impacts. Licensed water treatment operators are scarce. If we lose them to COVID-19 and our other regional partners are impacted as well, we would find ourselves at great risk.

Supply Chain:

Supply chain, for both PPE (masks and cleaning solutions) as well as for chemical supplies for treating water. PPE are needed not just to protect staff from the virus, but also their daily work that requires specific PPE. (i.e., employees who work with chemicals, oils, fluids, etc.) We have water districts that are constructing their own masks and making their own sanitizer. Another supply chain risk that does not have a workaround is supply chain disruptions for water treatment chemicals. If the chemical companies were not able to make and deliver chemicals to water managers major problems would occur.

Revenue:

Water managers are sensitive to financial hardship caused by COVID-19. Many have voluntarily suspended water shutoffs and some states have issued orders prohibiting shutoffs for nonpayment. However there is a growing concern about long term loss of revenue and how this will affect water operations. Water providers are using any and all reserves to keep everything running when costs to respond and protect and pay for inactive staff is mounting. This is going to have a major fiscal impact to all water purveyors.

What would help mitigate risks?

Protecting Staff: Assure Mutual Aid is ready and in-place between water agencies, particularly in the water treatment and laboratory staff. If we lose too many of them, we are at potential risk. We need to conduct emergency training between sister agencies of water treatment operators in case they need to be mobilized quickly due to infection.

Revenue: Provide stimulus funding for key lifelines like water agencies as future federal funding becomes available. We need to make sure we're ready for the future as well. Provision of bridge funding, possibly in form of no interest loans, to drinking water systems and wastewater systems with reduced revenue due to the temporary suspensions of shutoffs for nonpayment. This would help systems cover costs until customers make their payments.

Help inform the public:

Keep the messaging going to the public that our water supply and quality is good. Also emphasize the problems created by flushing sanitary wipes.

Comments from Around the West

Colorado

Denver Water

Capital Projects/Budget - To date, we have not experienced revenue declines from water sales, primarily due to the hot summer and increased residential water use. We have seen a decline in System Development Charges, which began in February before the COVID hit. We are on track with all capital projects and are actually planning to exceed capital budget for 2020 with some retiming of projects. We are teleworking and working virtually, but design, bidding and construction are all on track, even with COVID protocols in place in the field.

As far as capital markets, we did a \$500M bond issue/refinance in March, and received AAA ratings from all three rating agencies and historically low interest rates.

Recreation - Denver Water properties and facilities have seen heavy recreation pressure. We've closed Waterton Canyon, and recently reopened it only on weekdays.

Forest Restoration/Watershed Health - We are looking for cuts to our operating budget to create room in the event revenues decline as COVID continues on. Part of those cuts include certain watershed projects. We are planning on continuing our partnership with USFS on Forests to Faucets.

Shut offs - We terminated shutoffs due to inability to pay in March, and that policy continues. We have not seen a large spike in delinquencies or aging accounts and to date have not seen a decline in revenues. However, we are watching closely as federal assistance and the moratorium on enforcement for rent and mortgage payments ends, and if Congress cannot come to agreement on the next stimulus/relief package. We may see a sudden spike in delinquencies if no relief package is forthcoming.

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Budget considerations for the Colorado Water Conservation Board are in the companion document.

As to CWCB loan program:

"Borrowers" are about 30% Muni and 70% Private.

The "dollars" are about the opposite. (70% Muni and 30% Private)

Now of the Private, most of them are Mutual Dich Cos that have shares that are Muni.

We have not had any indication of trouble with repayment due to COVID Economy or continuing with a project "under construction" that we are financing.

We did have a Muni borrower indicate a "pay in full" due to better interest rates with a new Private Bond take out.

Aging infrastructure is a big issue for the agricultural community. This is compounded by the stress of urban growth and extreme climate variations. Dams and diversions and ditches are 120 years old and have long been in need of financial assistance. I assume as in previous downturns in the economy, the uncertainty will have an impact on ag folks willingness to replace failing infrastructure but instead use temporary repairs.

Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority

We are starting to see some requests (3 or 4 currently) for loan restructures. This is rare for us. With that said, we have not had any entities not make or fall behind in payments.

Entities more dependent on sales tax (resort communities for example) are showing more distress, as anticipated. We have talked to several (5 to 10) municipalities that are pushing off all non-critical projects due to budget issues/concerns.

Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife

CPW reports their latest Aquatic Nuisance Species boat inspection numbers 2020 to date as compared to this time of year in 2019 are as follows:

299,667 Boat Inspections as of July 6, 2020 (192,113 in 2019)

8,962 Boat Decontaminations as of July 6, 2020 (5,243 in 2019)

Idaho

For Idaho, the first issue regarding infrastructure is a big one. With commodity prices tanking and other impacts to economies, the local share of infrastructure needs are going to be more difficult. At the same time, our experience is that the cost of construction/repairs continues to rise. Entities are struggling to see how they will be able to cover the immediate cost of infrastructure repairs. It is anticipated that many of these economic impacts will extend into future years.

Currently, Reclamation is developing a feasibility study and NEPA analysis for a proposed raise to Anderson Ranch Dam, in southern Idaho. We expect the draft feasibility and NEPA analysis by the end of this month, with final documents out early 2021. Given falling revenues, I am concerned about the ability of the State and other local entities to cover the non-federal share of the costs. The state did set aside \$20 million for the project, but I anticipate the non-federal share to be much higher than that. Idaho is forecasting at least 3-years of economic impacts to revenues from COVID-19.

New Mexico

I see drought as the new and rapidly growing Weatherdemic plaguing the southwest and the Western States, in general. Certainly, trying to deliver 14 inches out of normal 3 ac/ft allotment to farmers in southern NM is a challenge or running out of water completely in the middle Rio Grande valley is becoming the new normal. I see the 2021 snow season approaching with not much hope for any relief in New Mexico.

New Infrastructure is needed to address more efficient ways to move water and conserve this precious resource with new innovative techniques and methods before the drilldown of this drought becomes catastrophic. Now is the time to push Congress to release the funding to improve the means in which we provide our water to our farmers.

With some relief coming from lessening of NEPA constraints; the time is now to try to get the necessary funding released that has been bottled up. Farmers need to rely on the life blood of surface and ground water to circulate through the old blocked and clogged arteries referred to as aging irrigation infrastructure to grow our agricultural commodities.

We need the efforts of our President and Congress to help sustain the resilient nature of farmers to continue to provide food and fiber during these uncertain times and find the means to improve this aging water infrastructure across the western States.

Nevada

My comments pattern those made for Idaho. We expect a Record of Decision relating to extraordinary maintenance (XM) on the Truckee Canal in Western Nevada sometime soon. The preferred alternative in the Environmental Impact Statement is a concrete lining and replacement of check structures at a total cost of as much as \$138M –an amount as much as twenty times our annual budget! COVID has served only to amplify our distress when considering the scope of any such a project amidst the economic uncertainties now plaguing us all! And beyond our concerns relating to the economy generally, we are also beginning to think 2021 will be dry!

Washington

Infrastructure funding for Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District has fallen behind due to covid. Between staff working outside the office and financial institutions not working or working outside it has made it almost impossible to keep moving forward with a bond process. We are about 6 months behind on our bond and we already applied for and received a grant for part of our project.



The Time is Now to Invest in Western Water Infrastructure – Let's Do It.

By Christine Arbogast and Patrick O'Toole

The coronavirus crisis reminds those of us in the water world of the importance of the systems which sustain us.

Our water systems are among the very most important. The need for effective planning, preparation and implementation of water policy and infrastructure is critical, as we manage the engines which drive our economy, our health and our safety. It is most certainly a primary focus of the Western water community, which develops and manages the water infrastructure so critical to every individual and every economic sector.

Our organizations and other industry leaders have long anticipated the potential crisis if we fail to invest soon in the aging systems which store and deliver water for safe drinking, for agriculture production and for industry. We will face another crisis if we fail to invest in new water storage infrastructure to save water for use in dry years. Years of recurring drought conditions in Western states, and the economic and human impacts of drought, require us to look ahead.

But as we have seen in the health crisis of the spring of 2020, anticipation on paper isn't enough. We must prepare, and we must invest.

An investment in water infrastructure is a powerful investment in our economy, our communities and our health. Since 1902, the investment in Bureau of Reclamation infrastructure has been about \$20 billion. Annually, this infrastructure spurs \$62 billion in direct and associated economic activity. Between 2010 and 2013, every dollar invested in Army Corps of Engineers civil works generated sixteen dollars in economic benefits. Every year, our economy recoups its investment in water infrastructure multiple times over.

For the 17 Western states studied in a 2015 Family Farm Alliance economic report, the total household income impacts from irrigated agriculture, associated service industries, and food processing sectors was \$172 billion annually. Irrigated farming and ranching is a huge economic driver in the West, particularly in rural communities. However, this economic force would virtually disappear, along with the rural American communities dependent on farming and ranching, if the water infrastructure that supports it crumbles.

Infrastructure needs offer an immediate and long-lasting way to stimulate our deeply troubled economy. We saw the positive impact of such investment after the recession of 2008.

Across the West, there are hundreds of small non-federal dams which store water for domestic and irrigation purposes in rural areas. Many are under state restrictions and cannot store water to capacity because they are not safe. In Colorado, for instance, the cost of many of these dam repairs is \$1-3 million each. That infrastructure investment is one-time and would not require ongoing federal cost.

Let's do it.

Many existing storage facilities, federally owned and provider owned, could easily be expanded to store more water when the semi-arid West is blessed with good precipitation. Enlarging existing facilities has a more immediate impact on supplies, is an affordable way to expand supplies, and enjoys significant public support.

Let's do it.

We've seen technologies develop which increase the efficiency of water delivery for both domestic and irrigation purposes. Increasing the manufacture of these technologies and providing incentive for applying them to municipal water systems and agricultural production can conserve finite water resources. In this way, they can be made available in drought periods and can be used for economic development across the board.

Let's do it.

And we know that, while we are unlikely to building another Hoover or Grand Coulee Dam, the long term value of developing more storage is certain. It must be done in an environmentally sensitive and strategic way. And it must be done cooperatively between the federal, state and local water agencies which ensure the water supply which absolutely is our lifeblood.

Crisis—be it a health crisis, a drought crisis, a flood crisis—compels us to work together.

Partnerships are a critical piece of infrastructure investment, and can reach beyond the three levels of government to private sector involvement as well. Policies on infrastructure investment would be most effective if a cooperative development and management structure were a requirement.

The infrastructure investment conversation has been loud and clear in recent years. But the actual infrastructure investment has not been made.

The time is now. Let's do it.

We understand the fiscal difficulty of a large infrastructure stimulus package. But we also understand the historical proof of its effectiveness

If indeed our leaders are unable to reach consensus on a large-scale infrastructure investment plan, we have other specific opportunities for the Administration and Congress to invest in Western water infrastructure. Bills like S. 1932 the *Drought Resiliency and Water Supply Infrastructure Act*, and S. 2044 the *Water Supply Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Utilization Act* address needs long anticipated by Western water resource managers. The biannual Water Resources Development Act, currently teed up in the House and the Senate, affords the opportunity to anticipate and act on Western water needs if it includes a title for Bureau of Reclamation programs and projects, as it has in recent years.

The importance of anticipating a potential crisis, and effectively preparing for it with solid planning and investment, can mitigate or even avert the crisis. We in Western water have done that. The federal government needs to be our partner.

Let's do it.

Christine Arbogast is President of the National Water Resources Association, which represents state water associations, irrigation districts, municipal water providers, end water users and their collective interests in the management of irrigation and municipal water supplies throughout the Western U.S. and portions of the South.

Patrick O'Toole, a cattle and sheep rancher from Wyoming, is President of the Family Farm Alliance, which advocates for family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts, and allied industries in sixteen Western states. The Alliance is focused on one mission – to ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers.

The NWRA and the Alliance are organizations that represent the water users that are the cornerstone of western communities and their economies.



Water Issues Driven by COVID
Colorado Water Congress Member Responses
April 2020 Survey

1. Infrastructure Funding
2. Financial Impact on Water Utilities
3. Utility Operations Impacts
4. Wastewater Collection and Treatment
5. Cyber Security Risks
6. Management/Staffing
7. Employee Health & Safety
8. Customers Paying Water Bills
9. Communications
10. Rural/Agriculture

Infrastructure Funding

Concerns

Water Infrastructure Deficiencies – American Society of Civil Engineers identified:

- a \$84 Billion gap between what is needed and what is spent on water supply and wastewater treatment facilities,
- a \$45 Billion repair need for aging high hazard dams,
- a \$80 Billion need for maintaining and improving the nations levee systems.

Additionally, according to the National Academy of Sciences, the Association of State Floodplain Managers, and several universities, aging and inadequate stormwater infrastructure is contributing to a growing urban flood risk.

These infrastructure deficiencies cost the nation hundreds of billions every year and present social, environmental, and economic risks that can be mitigated with new ways of ensuring adequate resources are available to catch up and not fall behind again.

Flooding – According to FEMA this is the #1 natural hazard. According to NOAA, in the decade from 2009 to 2019 flooding caused over \$393 Billion in damage.

Deterioration of watersheds and natural systems due to public inattention and ineffective regulation.

Continuation of larger construction projects.

Mitigation

What is needed are improvements to how we (government/tribes, private sector, academia, others) work together to manage this risk in watersheds across jurisdictional boundaries both before and after disasters strike.

Provide reasonable flexibility in achieving regulatory compliance for essential construction projects.

Clear and consistent path to comply with environmental regulations – so that emergency funds can be efficiently applied to shovel ready projects. Look to existing regulations and guidance to provide a road map to quick and certain compliance.

Sufficient public funds to keep projects moving on a speedy, predictable timeline

Regulatory consistency as we prepare to receive infrastructure funds from DC

Regulatory certainty regarding the new navigable waters rule and its status

Support, resources, and reduced red tape from federal agencies to permit large water projects

Financial Impact on Water Utilities

Concerns

Financial viability of the utility is at risk – both operations and longer-term capital project needs.

Water utilities are dependent upon customer payments. If customers cannot afford to pay their bills, it sets off a chain of financial constraints. We have learned that the remedy of turning off water service is a non-starter in almost every community in the country. Where the utility operates as a municipal department, the pressure will be on local officials to divert cash out of the water utility to subsidize other municipal services. Diverting revenues will exacerbate the financial stability of the water utility.

How does a utility compassionately and respectfully begin to collect outstanding utility bills?

Water demand (water sales) may decrease due to unemployment, loss of tourism, reduction in lawn watering, decline of commercial/industrial customer base.

Tap fees decline due to economic disruptions/recession.

Declining revenue generation will decrease the ability to implement major capital projects.

Pressure to reduce near-term critical maintenance will cause long-term problems.

Liability from both employees and customers due to alleged safeguards in the work environment.

Mitigation

Utilities will need a number of financial strategies.

Budget scenario planning focused on scenario planning to understand potential range of disruption to both operations and revenues. Will evaluate potential mitigation strategies over the next 3 to 18 months

Look at the debt of the municipal utilities and consider major refinancing and consolidation of debt in order to lower payments. US Government could buy the debt and place it in retirement portfolios,

package it and sell it to large pension and other funds and so on. These utility debt instruments should be good investments for such purposes.

Lowering debt service would help cash flow.

Additional funding sources may be needed, especially federal funding assistance for delinquent accounts

New safeguards for walk-in customers and upgrade revenue processing systems for online payments.

Look at rate structures – fixed v. variable rates.

Utility Operations Impacts

Concerns

Supply costs may rise – for example, if chemical manufacturers go out of business resulting in lower supply

Maintaining system pressure.

Responding and addressing worsening and changing water quality

What happens if there is a natural disaster on top of the COVID situation?

Mitigation

Federal government ensures we have the infrastructure to respond earlier and more comprehensively so that this doesn't happen again.

Is there a risk of depending too much on the federal government?

Have federal or state response team if insufficient personnel.

Supply chain interruptions of necessary treatment chemicals.

Electrical system interruptions.

Require utilities and water providers to have a crisis response, Emergency Operations Center, or Continuity of Operations Plans that takes into account the loss of personnel.

Build new, robust treatment plants and increase replacement of distribution system pipelines and pump stations.

Operational technologies, enhanced and secure systems that allow remote operation (cyber secure).

Protect and secure watersheds, augment with additional water supplies and interconnections for reliability and redundancy.

Transition Board meetings to Zoom for public meetings.

Wastewater Collection and Treatment

Concerns

Strongly supporting the supply chain is critical. We cannot treat water and wastewater without the proper treatment agents, disinfection chemicals, etc.. We need to make sure those products are both available and also delivered without delay.

Wastewater treatment is at risk due to the increase use of anti-bacterial products and additional cleaners. We have seen our bug population (bacteria used to treat wastewater) die off or become stunted. These bacteria are essential to wastewater treatment. The more people use cleaners and anti-bacterial type products, the more this stuff flows down the sewer and kills the "good" bacteria. both the physical clogging and the toxicity to biologic treatment processes caused by the anti-bacterial fluid they are soaked in.

Clogging Wastewater Pipes from "flushable" wipes.

Mitigation

Legislation on labeling of wipes ie they are NOT flushable.

Cyber Security Risks

Concerns

IT security risks due to opening up systems so that staff can work remotely.

Mitigation

Federal assistance with cybersecurity.

Management/Staffing

Concerns

Availability of certified/trained/experienced workforce to substitute for absent personnel.

Employee attrition due to sickness/quarantine - especially water/wastewater treatment operators and field crews. Effectiveness of the remaining crew members.

Ability of field employees to get into the field to do their work.

Ability to respond to emergencies in the distribution or collection systems.

Stability of work schedules.

Organizations are interconnected – if one area is impacted, all areas are impacted.

Transmission of COVID-19 between office personnel who work with customers and the public.

Health care costs are likely to rise, increasing the utility's contribution to this benefit. In addition, expectation that there will be an uptick in FMLA claims for healthy staff struggling with childcare.

Unqualified folks making decisions and taking action that could damage the delivery systems.

Because water is undervalued, we have a hard time recruiting people to work in the industry.

Managing ever sophisticated treatment processes and expanding distribution systems requiring higher skills

Mitigation

Utilities might help each other out regionally with staffing. Regional pool to compensate utilities for helping each other.

Put State resources toward rural economies/workforce development – especially rural economies dependent on tourism and recreation.

Employee Health & Safety

Concerns

Uncertainty if crews have been exposed to COVID-19.

Keeping key staff healthy – especially water/wastewater treatment operators, field operations staff, and management team.

Emergency staffing protocols to avoid infections - availability of PPE and N95 face masks.

Employee mental health including potential for burnout and stress.

Employees out for sick leave may increase workload or pressure on other employees.

Setting up administrative codes for employee absences – sick, childcare, tending to family to protect Paid Time Off Balances.

Mitigation

Nationwide testing program for return to work and isolation.

Limit the amount of contact with the public and encouraging everyone to stay safe.

Fast-track routine and reliable COVID-19 prophylactic measures and treatment.

Developing staggered shifts to reduce the number of essential staff needed at any given time in the field or at treatment plants.

Develop a strategic stockpile of masks, hand sanitizer, PPE for field and treatment plant personnel.

Customers Paying Water Bills

Concerns

Many customers, especially low income, may accrue significant utility bills and be unable to repay them more people are at home using more water.

Customers are going to need financial support when the stimulus money runs out - that money needs to come directly to the utility to support operational costs. If it is given to the customer, the customer will spend it on what is deemed the highest priority for that customers. That may not be treated water.

Mitigation

Encouraging customers to pay as much as they can, so they do not fall too far behind.

Financial support for our customers so they can pay their bills.

Communications

Mitigation

We believe the pandemic will change the way we work in the future. We are setting up a national outreach program including free online training to be offered to anyone interested. The purpose is to help communities and the industry stay connected – with no undertone of business development. We all strive for the betterment of mankind so in reality we are one joined to focus on this common vision.

Better public health awareness in the water sector, especially public water utilities.

Making the connection between long-term water security and long-term food security

Improve public understanding of water and wastewater treatment processes and how they protect public health.

Rural/Agriculture

Concerns

Forest/watershed health is one of the top risks to water security.

One of the greatest risks for ag water users and uses will be lack of funding sources to maintain infrastructure. With Colorado Water Conservation Board's budget likely being revised, some sources of funding will have be suspended. The problem I see is that if we cannot improve efficiencies with our water we will struggle to remain creative in how we address upcoming issues.

Currently J Bar M controls and has influence over the Cow Creek drainages and its flows into the Uncompahgre, our main issue at moment which is caused by COVID-19 is that we don't want to use too many subs to get things operational and running due to lack of information available regarding how to stay safe in terms of the viruses life span on differing things (ie: steel, plastic , cardboard etc.). So to avoid crossing any of those things, it's easier to just allow ourselves to handle head gates and equipment required to get streams and ditches up and running which is concurrently being hindered by the current

stance of telling those not working to be outside in open spaces to get fresh air. At the moment, my crew is only able to operate at half or one third efficiency as we have to spend a great deal of time watching for or dealing with people trespassing and playing with things like head gates. By encouraging open spaces as a place to get fresh air and exercise, but shutting down parks and local places that local people normally go they are forced to venture into ranching and agricultural areas that they don't really know which is slowing our production. Things may be marked but more often than not people tend to assume if they don't see a person, there is no harm in crossing a fence or opening a gate to stretch their legs, and are often aggressive when confronted and told not to be where they are. Sadly our State, like most, don't have enough law enforcement to handle trespassing calls on the scale we are beginning to deal with, but need to find a solution as too many agriculture places are spending more time looking over their shoulders and less time getting ditches open, fields irrigated and cows tended. I know this isn't likely what you were looking for, but it is the only effect I'm seeing so far from COVID-19 and would be much easier to just be able to focus on our normal work and get supplies going rather than having to have routinely check or confront people that are far out of their element.



COLORADO
Colorado Water
Conservation Board
 Department of Natural Resources

1313 Sherman Street, Room 718
 Denver, CO 80203
 P (303) 866-3441
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Jared Polis, Governor
 Dan Gibbs, DNR Executive Director
 Rebecca Mitchell, CWCB Director

TO: Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

FROM: Lauren Ris, CWCB Deputy Director
 Anna Mauss, CWCB Chief Operating Officer

DATE: July 15-16, 2020

AGENDA ITEM: 10. Budget Update

Introduction:

This informational agenda item will describe the CWCB budget impacts as a result of the economic consequences associated with COVID-19. These impacts will likely span three fiscal years: fiscal year 2019-20 (ended on June 30, 2020), the current fiscal year 2020-21, and the next fiscal year 2021-22.

Discussion:

Fiscal Year 2019-20

General Fund revenue declined dramatically in the last quarter of FY 2019-20 due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. In response, Governor Polis issued a sequestration plan through Executive Order D 2020 050, in addition to other statewide fiscal conservation guidance from the Governor's Office of State Planning and Budgeting. The order implemented a targeted state-wide spending reduction of \$228.7 million General Fund to maintain minimum statutory reserve requirements. As part of this sequestration plan, approximately \$866,000 of the \$1.7 million General Fund appropriation for CWCB's demand management feasibility study (authorized by Senate Bill 19-212) was redirected to help address this general fund shortfall. Due to the COVID-19 related travel and meeting restrictions that impacted the demand management work groups, and being able to do more work in house than previously anticipated, CWCB does not expect any significant impacts to the effort.

In this fiscal year, the CWCB's Perpetual Base Fund and Construction Fund each contributed \$33 million to the TABOR emergency reserve (\$66 million total). While these funds were not ultimately drawn on for this purpose, this fact contributed to the overall uncertainty of the status of these funds and their availability for new expenditures.

Due to the significant revenue shortfalls projected, and the role that CWCB's cash funds would play in backfilling these shortfalls either through the TABOR emergency reserve or through any budget balancing actions by the General Assembly, CWCB staff postponed bringing Water Plan Grant recommendations scheduled for the May Board meeting to this July meeting (Agenda Item 21).



Fiscal Year 2020-21

As part of the budget balancing package to backfill the \$3.3 billion General Fund revenue shortfall for FY 2020-21, the Long Bill package redirected \$45.5 million from the Perpetual Base Fund to the General Fund. In taking this action, the Joint Budget Committee considered the needs of CWCB's Loan Program allowing staff to bring new loan recommendations for this year. Additionally, the Long Bill included only \$33 million from the Construction Fund for the TABOR Emergency Reserve for this fiscal year (as compared to the previous year's inclusion of an additional \$33 million from the Perpetual Base Fund).

The June 2020 Legislative Council Staff Revenue Forecast projects an 81% decline in statewide severance tax revenue compared to Fiscal Year 2019-20 resulting from the historic collapse in oil prices that occurred in mid-March 2020. Based on this forecast, both DNR severance tax cash funds--the Perpetual Base Fund and the Operational Fund--are projected to receive only \$5 million each in FY 2020-21. In order to ensure that there is sufficient revenue in the Operational Fund to support the staff salaries and ongoing operations in DNR Core Programs, DNR is restricting spending of the August disbursement of funding to the DNR Grant Programs (including the Water Supply Reserve Fund, the Water Efficiency Grant Program, and IBCC) until the fund has stabilized. In addition, the CWCB receives up to 5% of the Core Program funding for Operational Fund Grants on an annual basis. These grants were approved by the Board in March, however in order to support the other Core Programs, these grants will not receive funding and the grant program will be suspended pending future revenue projections. DNR is monitoring the status of Operational Fund on a continuous basis and will revisit restrictions after every quarterly revenue forecast.

Additionally, the 2020 Projects Bill (HB 20-1403) passed which included appropriations from the Construction Fund to a variety of programs, including additional funding for the Water Plan Grant Program, the Watershed Restoration Program, and the Alternative Transfer Methods (ATM) Program. However, due to the continued economic uncertainty, CWCB staff anticipates needing to budget conservatively and stretch available grant program funding over the next three fiscal years. Additional information as it relates to this spending plan will be discussed during the September Finance Committee meeting. Table 1. Summarizes the various impacts to CWCB programs.



Table 1. Budget Impacts to CWCB Programs.

SEVERANCE TAX SUPPORTED PROGRAMS	IMPACT
Severance Tax Operational Fund Grants	Grants approved by the board in March 2020 that were expected to begin in July 2020 will not proceed with contracting. Funding for this grant program is suspended until further notice.
Water Supply Reserve Fund Grants	No new funding in FY21. Roundtables can still award grants from the current basin account fund balances. Grants that were approved by the CWCB in FY 19/20 are still moving forward. The current balance for the statewide account will be stretched over the next three fiscal years.
Water Efficiency Grant Program	The program will not receive additional funding in FY21. Limited grants can be awarded based on the fund balance. The current balance will be stretched over the next three fiscal years.
Species Conservation Trust Fund	The program will not receive additional severance tax funding in FY21. Limited projects will continue based on the fund balance. This does not affect funding that was authorized in this year's SCTF legislation (SB20-201).
Interbasin Compact Committee	This program will not receive additional funding in FY21. Funding can be spent from the existing balances. However, funds for meeting space, food, travel will be limited (and may not be permitted at all depending on public health orders in place at the time of the meeting).
Loan Program	No impacts expected this Fiscal Year. Loan applications are being accepted.
CONSTRUCTION FUND SUPPORTED PROGRAMS	IMPACT
Water Plan Grant Program	The Projects Bill passed including funding for new grants. The board will consider applications postponed in May at its July 2020 meeting (stemming from the February 1, 2020 application round). The Board will consider staff's recommendation for future application deadlines in Agenda Item 20.
CO Watershed Restoration Grant Program	The Projects Bill passed including funding for grants. The current balance will be stretched over the next three fiscal years.
ATM Grant Program	The Projects Bill passed including funding for grants. The current balance will be stretched over the next three fiscal years.



Fiscal Year 2021-22

While state revenue is projected to rebound, revenue collections for FY 2021-22 are expected to remain below FY 2018-19 levels. The State and Legislative economists caution that the economic outlook is especially uncertain in light of the evolving COVID-19 crisis and depends on the trajectory of the pandemic, the pace of the recovery, and the availability of federal aid. Even with a strong rebound in economic activity, the state budget situation is still expected to be very challenging in FY 2021-22 with a significant General Fund revenue shortfall to account for.

In spite of this uncertainty, the budget planning cycle for Fiscal Year 2021-22 has already begun. Agencies are currently in the process of preparing budget scenarios for the Office of State Planning and Budgeting and DNR anticipates responding to future budget reduction targets.

After the passage of Proposition DD during the November 2019 election, sports betting launched on May 1; however, revenues face an uncertain near-term future with all professional sports indefinitely suspended in the U.S. A forecast of sports betting revenue will be available in future forecasts, once tax collections data for several months become available.

Background:

Severance Tax Perpetual Base Fund

Revenue into the Perpetual Base Fund comes from interest on loans, treasury interest, and 25% of statewide Severance Tax Revenue. The CWCB is authorized to use the fund to make low-interest loans. Interest generated from these loans goes back into the fund.

DNR Severance Tax Operational Fund

The DNR Operational Fund receives 25% of severance tax revenue to support two tiers of programs: Core Programs and Grants. Core Programs provide funding for staff salaries and operations in several DNR agencies including the Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, Division of Reclamation Mining and Safety, Avalanche Information Center, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. CWCB also receives up to 5% of this Core Program funding, however, unlike the other DNR agencies, CWCB uses that funding for Severance Tax Operational Fund Grants (typically about \$1.3 million). See Figure 1.

When the annual revenue into the Operational Fund exceeds \$17 million satisfying the funding needs of the Core Programs plus the 100% Core Program reserve requirement is met, any additional revenue is distributed proportionally to DNR Grant Programs. See Figure 2. The CWCB Grant Programs include:

- Water Supply Reserve Fund (up to \$10 million)
- Species Conservation Trust Fund (up to \$5 million)
- Water Efficiency Grant Program (up to \$550K)
- Interbasin Compact Committee Operations Fund (up to \$745K)



Figure 1. Distribution of severance tax revenue.

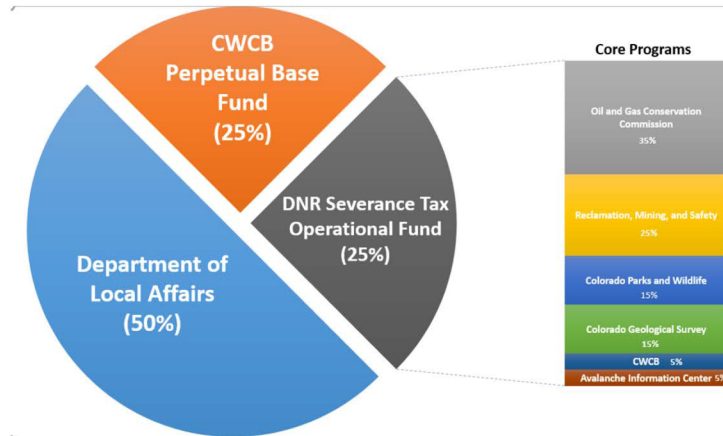
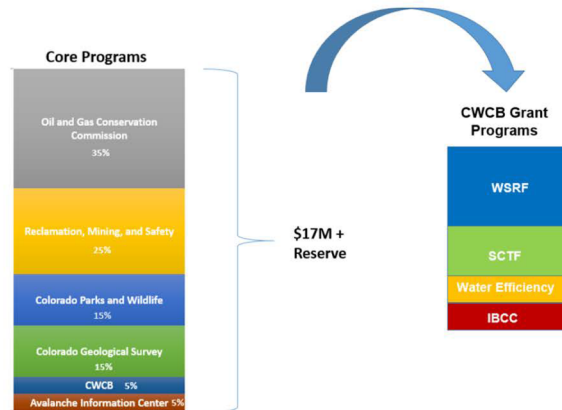


Figure 2. Distribution of of severance tax revenue once the Core Programs funding obligation has been met to Grant Programs.



COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE
Members: Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Timber Industry, The Nature
Conservancy, Club 20, and Watershed Health Investment Partners

April 30, 2019

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Chair
 Senator Tom Udall, Ranking Member
 U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,
 Environment and Related Agencies
 131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Murkowski and Senator Udall,

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we write to urge you to provide full funding in line with the 2018 Farm Bill for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). As communities across the country struggle with the impact of severe fire seasons, now is the time to expand this vital forest program.

Since its enactment in 2009, CFLRP has had a proven track record of success in bringing collaboration to our forests to increase forest health, mitigate wildfires, and support rural economies and local voices. CFLRP requires various local stakeholders to collaborate, resulting in stronger relationships on the ground, better projects, and a decreased risk of conflict and litigation.

To date, 23 CFLRP projects in 14 states have sold more than 2.5 billion board feet of timber; created \$1.4 billion in local labor income; and improved 760 miles of trails for sports enthusiasts and recreation. On average, CFLRP creates or maintains 5,400 jobs each year at current funding levels - a number that would likely increase if funding is expanded. In addition, CFLRP has reduced the risk of megafires on more than 2.9 million acres.

Because of this bipartisan program's successful track record, the 2018 Farm Bill (Public Law 115-334) doubled the size of its funding authorization. There is interest across the country in establishing new collaborative projects as well as sustaining current projects. As the national conservation on forest management continues, it is imperative that we invest in programs that reduce conflict in our forests and increase the number of logs sent to mills.

As you draft the FY2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you fully fund CFLRP. Thank you for considering this request.

Respectfully,

Travis Smith for
Colorado Water Congress

Molly Pitts for
Colorado Timber Industry Association

Aaron Citron for
The Nature Conservancy

Cindy Dozier for
Club 20

Mark Shea for
Watershed Health Investment Partners

c. Senator Cory Gardner
 Senator Michael Bennet

COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE
 Box 165, Florissant, CO 80816

July 1, 2020

The Honorable James Hubbard, Undersecretary of Agriculture
 United States Department of Agriculture
 1400 Independence Ave, SW
 Washington, DC 20250

Dear Undersecretary Hubbard:

Our organization, the Colorado Forest and Water Alliance (COFWA), was formed to advocate for policies and actions that create resilient forests and watersheds here in Colorado. But we know our efforts in Colorado reach far beyond our borders: Colorado's major rivers provide life sustaining water to numerous downstream states, not only benefitting millions of people, but also their agriculture, outdoor recreation economies, and fish and wildlife populations.

Over two decades ago, forestry and water leaders in Colorado recognized that restoring forests and watersheds helps to protect water supplies and water quality. We believe our track record of success in Forest-Water leadership and innovation is a compelling example for other states to follow. COFWA celebrates success stories from across the state, which this short list exemplifies:

- Creation of over 70 forest and watershed collaboratives across Colorado, beginning as early as 1987;
- Implementation of Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) projects on the Front Range and the Uncompahgre Plateau, which have implemented forest-restoration projects on over 48,000 acres, and 41,000 acres of prescribed fire, since 2009;
- Creation of state and local tax and financing options, such as development of the state's Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant program, which has allocated over \$14 million dollars to a matching-grant program since 2013, and Summit County's Wildfire Prevention tax, a voter-approved property tax that provides \$1 million per year toward wildfire prevention initiatives;
- Implementation of the Forests to Faucets program of work, through which municipal water providers invest millions of dollars each year in partnership with federal land managers to mitigate wildfire risks around critical source water supply areas;

The members of the Colorado Forest & Water Alliance (COFWA) have joined together for mutual assistance in advocating at state and federal levels about policies, funding, and programs that support meaningful and measurable improvements in forest health and watershed resiliency benefiting Colorado.

**Colorado Forest & Water Alliance Members: Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Timber Industry,
 Club 20, and the Watershed Health Investment Partners**

- Creation of Good Neighbor Authority—in which cross-boundary work can be completed on both federal and adjacent non-federal lands. This program was piloted in Colorado in 2000, and expanded in the 2018 Farm Bill to cover the entire country;
- Implementation of Colorado's Water Plan, which includes a strong focus on the nexus of water and forests, and emphasizes watershed health as a critical strategy for protecting Colorado's water supply future.

Recognizing water as a principle value to be protected is one of the unique features of the Colorado/USDA Shared Stewardship agreement that you and Governor Polis signed late last year. We recognize that the traditional USFS line item funding, and funding Region by Region, was never envisioned to address specifically the forest challenges that affect our headwater basins. Thus, we write today to request your continued support for funding programs that create the means for Colorado to continue our legacy of leadership in collaborative restoration efforts. Proven programs such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program have helped incentivize highly successful partnerships with multiple stakeholders. The first-of-its-kind Forests to Faucets program needs continued federal funding to maintain a direct match from water providers – thereby doubling the funding and capacity to treat critical acres. There is also a new program, part of the 2018 Farm Bill titled the Water Source Protection Program (WSPP), that is tailor-made for Colorado given our role as the pre-eminent headwaters state in the western United States. A recent letter from Senators Bennet and Wyden supporting appropriations for this program demonstrates Congressional intent to accelerate watershed restoration efforts in Colorado and across the West to protect our valuable water supplies.

We know these are very challenging times. COVID-19 will certainly continue to affect available Federal funds and programs. We also know that the wildfire threat to our forests, watersheds, and water supply infrastructure is only increasing – and time is not our friend. We respectfully urge you to consider Colorado's proven track record with collaboration, substantial matching funds from water providers, cross-boundary projects, and the full support of our political leadership, when you make decisions on where best to invest the limited federal funds available to improve forest conditions. COFWA believes Colorado has proven to be one of the best investments for USDA/USFS funds and programs anywhere in the country.

Thank you for your consideration and we are available to answer any questions either via letter or preferably via video conferencing. Finally, we appreciate all that you are doing promoting collaborative approaches to address the forest and watershed challenges we face today and in the future.

Respectfully,

/s/

Colorado Forest and Water Alliance:

Colorado Water Congress (Representative, Travis Smith, Doug Kemper)
 Colorado Timber Industry Association (Representative, Molly Pitts)
 Club 20 (Representatives Nancy Fishering, Cindy Dozier, Chris Treese)
 Watershed Health Investment Partners (Representatives Mark Shea, Mike McHugh)

Cc: Chief Vicki Christiansen
 Cc: Deputy Chief Chris French
 Cc: Acting Regional Forester Jennifer Eberlien

COLORADO FOREST AND WATER ALLIANCE

Forest and Watershed Health in Post-COVID-19 Stimulus Planning

POSITION: COFWA strongly urges all funding entities, when appropriating stimulus and/or infrastructure dollars, to increase financial support for utility and water supply infrastructure projects that protect, repair, and improve water supply resilience. Headwater watersheds are the natural infrastructure of western water supplies and require continued prioritization for mitigation of wildfire risk through increased funding and enhanced federal, state, and local agency support.

BACKGROUND: COFWA has followed the numerous discussions on addressing the economic fallout from the efforts to contain the COVID 19 pandemic. COFWA recognizes the challenges facing the utility and water supply sectors. COFWA has specific input in this regard, as identified in our 2020 Strategic Plan.

COFWA recognizes the unprecedented nature of COVID 19 and the devastating costs facing the economy and our citizens. Likewise, Colorado governmental entities face extreme revenue shortfalls and challenging decisions to recover from the economic consequences of this pandemic. With the early closure of ski areas, mountain communities have been hit hard, but these areas are also the 'high headwaters,' providing critical source water for millions of downstream users, including water utilities and agriculture. Increasing the pace and scale of project work that protects these critical water-supply sources from catastrophic wildfire improves both water and food security in Colorado during these unprecedented times of uncertainty, while simultaneously helping support the economies of many rural mountain communities by maintaining and increasing jobs locally.

Recent comprehensive water supply and drought planning (Drought Contingency Planning) in Colorado clearly identified the importance of healthy forest watersheds and the need to mitigate wildfire risks in order to secure essential water supplies. We urge Colorado entities and our federal partners to prioritize funding and other resources for water supplies as we navigate recovery from the pandemic. If effective steps are not taken to secure funding for these needs, new COVID-19-related competition for scarce dollars will likely divert federal and state funding away from the following critical programs:

- Full implementation of Colorado's Water Plan, related Basin Implementation Plans (Basin Roundtables), and the upcoming, newly revised Colorado Forest Action Plan and Atlas;
- Implementation of the federal Water Source Protection Program of the 2018 Farm Bill, which secured additional federal funding to match local watershed investments; and
- Increased wildfire risk reduction treatments in critical public utility corridors and water supply watersheds.

Many states will be needing assistance in the upcoming months. Colorado has the distinct advantage that the public lands within our state generate significant revenues from Special Use Permits and related activities. In addition to the nearly \$30 million currently paid by Colorado ski resorts, tens of millions are paid by utility companies that provide critical services to Coloradans. A greater portion of this local funding could be retained within Colorado immediately to provide jobs and increase our collective investment in projects to improve forest health and watershed protection as outlined in Colorado's Water Plan and Forest Action Plan – and reflected in the numerous NEPA-ready forest management projects already planned throughout our state. We must not lose these critical priorities as we face more challenges and already constrained budgets.

The members of the Colorado Forest & Water Alliance (COFWA) have joined together for mutual assistance in advocating at state and federal levels about policies, funding, and programs that support meaningful and measurable improvements in forest health and watershed resiliency benefiting Colorado.

**Colorado Forest & Water Alliance Members: Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Timber Industry,
Club 20, and the Watershed Health Investment Partners**

Approved by Consensus: April 16, 2020

Changing Markets

Even though certain items are disappearing from the store shelves, it appears that most of the food deficits have been the result of panic-driven demand rather than a lack of supply. The coronavirus pandemic initially caused a “tidal shift” in consumer behavior with restaurants closing and shoppers flocking to grocery stores instead. Food service companies are hurting, and worried. They lost their market, with the closure of arenas, stadiums, restaurants, airlines, and cruise ships. Early on in the pandemic, fifty percent of our country’s food supply had nowhere to go. Harris Farms in California plowed under 240 acres of iceberg lettuce last spring. For some farmers who have sold food to restaurants and school cafeterias, it will prove difficult to recover from the lost business. But, farmers and food suppliers are maneuvering to meet the shifting demand.

Collapse in Commodity Prices

On-farm problems caused by the COVID-19 outbreak are primarily tied to the collapse in commodity prices. In Arizona, dairy customers for alfalfa and silage would not answer their phone while dumping their milk. Those producing alfalfa and silage are still delivering on prior contracts, knowing they might not get paid. Some cotton farmers made the decision to not plant some fields that have traditionally been less efficient. Then, cotton prices that were below government loan levels surged, due to world- wide cancellations by retailers.

Farmers had to make immediate choices about what seed they pour in the planter. Or, should they take the risk at all? There was a bit of an incentive to leave fields unplanted in low price or high uncertainty times. Farmers are still irrigating crops, all workers are still reporting to work each day, and farmers keep paying the bills until the money runs out.

Farm and Ranch Labor

The food industry relies on more than 200,000 guest workers each year. About 90 percent of [the H-2A temporary visas](#) these workers need are issued in Mexico, where American consulates shut down. The embassy indefinitely halted visa interviews needed to process applications to come to the U.S., including for seasonal farm workers under the H-2A visa program. The suspension hit growers just as they were prepared to gear up for their peak spring and summer growing seasons. USDA working with the Department of State and DHS engaged to ensure minimal disruption in H-2A and H-2B visa applications during these uncertain times.

Unintended Consequences from New COVID-19 Laws

Under COVID legislation signed into law earlier this year, irrigation districts were required to provide up to 80 hours of paid sick leave and additional extended benefits to employees who are affected by COVID-19. Irrigation districts, which are generally political subdivisions of the States, will not qualify for any of the reimbursement allowances or tax credits related to this new federal

COVID-19 IMPACTS ON THE GROUND
by Family Farm Alliance

Western Irrigated Agriculture

Western U.S. agriculture is facing one of its biggest crises since the Great Depression, as the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted markets, disrupted the food supply chain, collapsed commodity prices, and intensified labor challenges. Rural communities on average were more vulnerable to the public health and economic crisis after a decade of slower recovery from the last recession, compared with more populated areas. They are also more reliant on industries like agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. The Western Governors' Association (WGA) last month released its [Reimagining the Rural West Initiative report](#) with a dozen recommendations to drive economic development efforts in the West, as businesses and towns try to recover from the pandemic.

Producers reported early on in the pandemic outbreak that it was difficult to get business done with the various safety and social distancing practices being employed. Lost markets and lost off-farm income related to the COVID-19 pandemic have proven doubly difficult for many California farmers and ranchers, according to a survey by the California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF). More than half of the farmers responding to the voluntary survey said they had lost customers or sales due to COVID-19, and nearly half said they or someone in their immediate family had lost off-farm income.

CFBF and the Farm Employers Labor Service, a Farm Bureau affiliate, asked farmers and ranchers to respond to an online survey form last April, and more than 500 responded. Nearly 57% of respondents said they had lost customers or sales during the pandemic, with most citing stay-at-home orders that had closed customers' businesses. Forty-two percent of responding farmers said they or a family member had lost off-farm income, mainly because of jobs unavailable due to stay-at-home orders or to care for children due to school and child-care closures. About three-quarters of the responding farmers said they had been able to maintain operations so far, and had been able to avoid furloughing or laying off employees. Of those who reported reducing operations or staff, most cited cuts to customer orders or revenue. Only 20% reported employees unable to work, mostly because the employees were considered in a high-risk group for the novel coronavirus. About one-third reported being unable to undertake routine planting, cultivation, or crop-care activities due to lack of personal protective equipment such as respiratory protection. To review the survey results, visit www.cfbf.com/impactsurvey.

In California and other parts of the West, the largest impacts appear to be associated with changing markets, the collapse in commodity prices, and farm and ranch labor. The livestock industry has been hit especially hard, as Ethan Lane will undoubtedly address in his testimony at the hearing.

mandate. Districts generally do not rely on taxpayer dollars to fund their budgets. They rely solely on assessments to farmers. So, this new legislation imposes an unfair and likely improper unfunded mandate on districts. If not corrected by Congress, districts will resort to raising farmer rates to make up any budgetary shortfall.

Outlook and keys to success

As you know, there are thousands of Western farmers, ranchers, and businesses on millions of acres of productive land who provide the food our nation relies upon. Many of these interests are concerned about future and uncertain COVID-19 impacts on domestic agriculture, the world economy and how that will affect farmers' ability to pay their bills. Hay and livestock markets are the mainstays of many rural communities in Colorado and other parts of the West. How will some of these global impacts may come back to further harm these markets? There are serious concerns about future severe disruptions and the unknown impacts they might impart.

The willingness of state and federal authorities to provide flexibility while ensuring food safety and minimizing waste will be crucial in the future. Coordination among all will be vital.

As Congress considers further measures to help our country recover economically - including boosting federal funding for infrastructure - we urge that Members consider critically needed investments that address the shortcomings of our aging Western water infrastructure.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of safety and stability provided by domestic food production. As this crisis has pointed out, a stable domestic food supply is essential and of national security interest. For farmers and ranchers to survive, and for food to continue to be produced here in the American West, a stable water supply is a necessary part of any conversation about our national food security.

As a result, we believe it is critical that our country continually invest in the Western water infrastructure necessary to meet current and future demands. Our existing water infrastructure in the West is aging and in need of rehabilitation and improvement. Most of the federally funded water infrastructure projects that benefit the large cities, rural communities and small farms in the West were built over 50 years ago. As hydrological conditions in the West change and populations continue to expand, failure to address water security has become increasingly critical. Failing to improve water infrastructure and develop supplies will inevitably result in additional conflict as pressure grows to "solve" urban and environmental water shortages. Moving water away from Western irrigated agriculture will surely contribute to the decline of our national food security.

While it appears that infrastructure provisions will likely not be included in the next COVID-19 stimulus package, we will continue to advocate that water conservation, water recycling, watershed management, conveyance, desalination, water transfers, groundwater storage, and surface storage are all needed for a diversified water management portfolio and such efforts MUST be included in the next major water legislative package, be it stimulus-related, or otherwise.

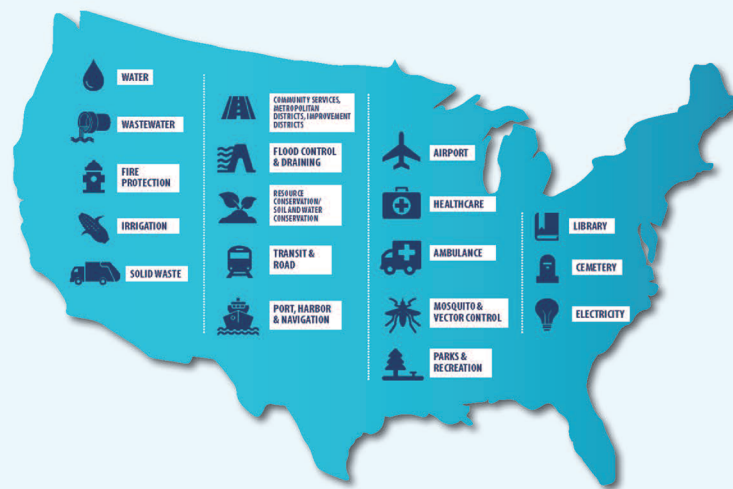


California Special
Districts Association
Districts Stronger Together

WHAT ARE SPECIAL DISTRICTS?

There are Approximately 30,000 special districts in the United States.

Special districts are local governments created by the people of a community to deliver specialized services that are essential to their health, safety, economy, and well-being.



Special districts are political subdivisions of states, authorized through enabling acts in statute and formed by the communities they serve.

Like cities and counties, special districts are local governments that deliver municipal services; however, they provide specialized services that their general-purpose counterparts do not provide to their residents.

Districts are subject to sunshine laws and governed by a board of directors accountable directly to their residents.

Special districts serve all kinds of communities from agricultural, rural, and disadvantaged unincorporated to incorporated cities and major metropolitan regions, driving innovation and achieving efficiency through focused-service and economies of scale.

HOW ARE SPECIAL DISTRICTS FUNDED?



SPECIAL DISTRICT SERVICES, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPITAL NEEDS ARE FUNDED THROUGH A VARIETY OF SOURCES.

- Revenue sources include fees for services, and each state varies on property tax or sales tax revenue.

- Most states demand a strict process for voter approval of the taxes and fees that fund district services.

- Due to strong local oversight and stringent Constitutional provisions enacted in most states, special districts often must find a way to do more with less than other government agencies.

WHY ARE SPECIAL DISTRICTS NECESSARY?



SPECIAL DISTRICTS ARE FORMED BY COMMUNITIES WHEN IT'S SOMETHING:

- The community wants
- The community wants done well
- The community wants done with local control

30K

Approximately 30,000 special districts provide services and infrastructure to millions of Americans in all 50 states.



Many districts provide infrastructure services the U.S. Department of Homeland Security deems "critical", such as water, irrigation, wastewater and agriculture services.

Special districts seek partnership with the state and federal governments to:

- Ensure safe and reliable services our communities depend on.
- Build resiliency to face adversity, such as wildfires and other natural disasters.
- Grow the economy through investment in local and regional infrastructure.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Kemper. We appreciate that. We will come back to the Committee room here and hear from Mr. Ethan Lane. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF ETHAN L. LANE, VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION

Mr. LANE. Thank you, Chair Murkowski for inviting me today. Ranking Member Manchin, thank you as well. My name is Ethan Lane. I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. NCBA is the oldest and largest trade association representing the U.S. cattle and beef industry. Formerly, I was the Executive Director of the Public Lands Council which is the only organization that advocates solely for the 22,000 grazing permit holders that operate on Western federal lands in the United States.

The testimony I offer today I hope will address two different issues. One, those issues germane to this Committee's jurisdiction, but two, hopefully to present to you a larger picture of what Western ranchers are dealing with in the face and context of COVID-19 over the past few months. It has truly been a challenging environment for our industry.

In April of 2020 some of the leading economists in the country, specifically agricultural economists, found that the economic impact to the U.S. cattle industry from COVID-19 was at \$13.6 billion and climbing. According to producers who sold cattle throughout the spring, their payments that they received for their live animals were something like 30 to 50 percent reduced from what they expected when they entered this season. For cow/calf producers operating on Western grazing allotments, this is perhaps even more exacerbated by the year-round nature of their businesses. That economic impact report estimated that \$111 could be attributed as lost to each steer sold this year with an escalating loss to \$247 moving into 2021 without some mitigating assistance.

The brunt of this economic impact really stems from some of the slowdowns that we saw in the processing sector. Obviously that was a large story during the peak of COVID-19, but it led to a tremendous backup of cattle and livestock on Western grazing lands and in the grazing industry, in general. Those producers chose not to follow the path that we saw in some of the other protein spaces by looking for options for depopulation and, instead, looked for areas to augment feed supplies, look for areas for additional forage and sustain those cattle until they could be processed in a timely manner. That strategy has proven successful, but we are now dealing with some of the other impacts that have been discussed here today, especially for those producers that are operating in the West.

In particular, speaking to the Chairman's comments when she opened this hearing, while there is a dramatic reduction in, maybe, formulized attendance at some of those national park sites, there is a dramatically increased amount of public usage of some of those public lands, particularly surrounding large, metropolitan areas. Our producers are seeing large surges of ad hoc usage of those lands which already before this pandemic were quite popular with

the American people. That is the point. This is a multiple-use environment. That's something that our producers hold very dear. They have managed in that environment for sometimes as much as seven generations, but at the volumes that we're seeing now, we are seeing some of those resources stretched beyond what they can really sustain. We're seeing water sources that are used, not just by livestock but by wildlife as well, encircled by large SUVs, four-wheel drive vehicles and other resources while ignoring requests that those be handled in a way that provides access for wildlife and livestock to those water sources. We're seeing new trails being made on an ad hoc basis by some of those off-road vehicles, by hikers, by others, without regard to the ecosystems that they are engaging in. And while we want to make sure that everybody enjoys those public lands and benefits from them equally, the regulatory environment that ranchers operate in basically means that as they go home with a consequence-free experience on their public lands, the ranchers that are held to a very high standard and constant scrutiny are left to deal with the ramifications both from a land/health perspective and an infrastructure cost perspective once that visit from the public is over.

We look forward to working with this Committee, with the Department of the Interior and USDA to try to find some ways to manage those roadblocks that are in the way of our producers doing the work that they need to do. As the rest of the economy shut down over the last four or five months, ranchers still showed up for work every day. Ranchers still ensured that there was beef at the center of American plates and they also ensured that the 250 million acres that we help manage in partnership with the Federal Government, continued to get that sustainable operational management that we have been providing for so long. So we look forward to your questions. We look forward to the discussion and look forward to charting a path forward for helping to manage these lands.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lane follows:]



Testimony of

Ethan L. Lane

Vice President of Government Affairs
National Cattlemen's Beef Association

On behalf of:

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Associated with the Public Lands Council

Before the:

United States Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
During the Full Committee Hearing to Examine the Impacts of the COVID-19
Pandemic on Users of Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks

July 23, 2020

10:30 a.m.

366 Dirksen Senate Office Building

TESTIMONY OF ETHAN L. LANE
UNITED STATES COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
HEARING TO EXAMINE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PUBLIC LANDS USERS
366 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
JULY 23, 2020

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today as the Committee examines impacts experienced by a broad range of sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

My name is Ethan Lane. Currently, I serve as Vice President of Government Affairs of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and previously served as Executive Director of the Public Lands Council. NCBA is the beef industry's oldest and largest national marketing and trade association representing American cattlemen and women who provide much of the nation's supply of food and own or manage a large portion of America's private property. Additionally, NCBA is an affiliate of the Public Lands Council, supporting their work to further priorities of America's public lands ranchers who hold federal grazing permits and operate within cooperative grazing agreements to produce food and fiber while improving management of public lands across the West.

The testimony I offer today outlines both impacts germane to this Committee's jurisdiction, as well as the larger needs of the livestock industry considered by other committees on which Members of this Committee serve. Without question, COVID-19 has had profound impacts on the global economy and has highlighted the American role in the global economy and social dynamic. This Committee has held a series of hearings related to COVID-19 impacts related to the energy industry, minerals supply chains, and U.S. Territories, which have offered prescient insights into the variety of concerns facing those who interact with public lands on a routine basis.

In April 2020, economists estimated COVID-related impacts to the cattle industry alone at more than \$13 billion. This loss is compounded across other agricultural commodities. We thank the Members of this Committee for your involvement in the swift and responsive assistance Congress provided to individuals, businesses, and federal agencies to ensure these financial losses were significantly mitigated. As Congress debates next steps in assistance for American agriculture producers, public lands can and should be a key factor in your analysis.

In the cattle industry, producers who had cattle prepared to imminently enter the food supply chain saw the first impacts as processing facilities made adjustments in preparation for and in response to COVID-19 effects on their workforce. A significant portion of the financial loss attributed to the pandemic was related to this first wave of impacts, from which our domestic food supply is still recalibrating. Given ongoing adjustments in production and consumer trends, we have prepared for the effects of the pandemic that still are yet to come.

In the United States, approximately 40 percent of the Western cattle herd and 50 percent of the nation's sheep herd spend at least part of their production cycle on public lands. Following the

first wave of COVID-19 impacts, our first priority for federal lands permittees was to ensure they would be able to turn out on their allotments on time. Delays in turnout would stress private forage resources that are operated in careful balance with a producer's permitted forage use on federal lands. Delays would also cause a significant interruption in the important fuels management function provided by livestock grazing on public lands. Across the West, federal lands have experienced acute and escalating impacts from intense wildfire, so delays in application of grazing as a key fire prevention tool could have been truly catastrophic. We appreciate the swift and thoughtful federal agency response; the Washington Offices of both the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) issued direction to their field staff to utilize all tools and technologies at their disposal to safely monitor range conditions and conduct socially-distanced meetings with permittees prior to approval of grazing permits. This is one of the positive outcomes of COVID-19: agency staff became adept at conducting the necessary meetings to finalize allowable grazing on permits over a variety of technological platforms. The use of technology has not previously been heavily featured in field activities like grazing permit Annual Operating Instruction meetings, so we were pleased to see the concerted effort agency officials undertook to conduct normal agency functions. The vast majority of permittees were able to turn their livestock out on time, with minimal disruption.

Our next priority was preparation for the upcoming wildfire season. Members of this Committee know well the challenges faced by the USFS, BLM, States, and other land managers during a normal fire season. Careful training and instruction are imperative to ensure the safety and survival of the first responders who are a key part of the long-term health of our public lands. This training is critical, particularly since USFS, BLM, and many state agencies rely on seasonal employees. These seasonal employees often fight alongside volunteer forces, many of which are comprised of local volunteers like ranchers, county commissioners, and rural fire response teams. As this Committee heard during the testimony of federal agencies in June 2020¹, federal assistance through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was critical in ensuring firefighters had the resources and training they needed to face the 2020 wildfire season.

A key factor in ensuring safety of wildfire firefighters and the health of natural resources lies in the success of reducing the overall wildfire risk. Managed grazing is a logical and effective tool, as environments are assessed to determine appropriate stocking rates and ranchers work throughout the grazing season to optimize forage consumption. In part, this optimization targets healthy growth of native perennial grasses as well as timely and concentrated grazing on invasive annual grasses, both of which encourage healthier biomes for wildlife and associated species while taking deliberate steps toward a more healthy and manageable fire regime. This is particularly important in a year where much of the West is under some level of elevated drought risk², which drastically increases the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Because livestock producers were able to turn out on time, the allotments will be less fireprone – resulting in benefits for both the ecosystem and those who manage it.

¹ Testimony of Amanda Kaster, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Lands and Minerals, Department of Agriculture, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources “Wildfire Management in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic”, June 9, 2020

² United States Drought Monitor released July 16, 2020. <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

Further, decreased fire risk is imperative for those who suffer from respiratory conditions, including those arising following COVID-19 infection. In June, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued new recommendations³ for practitioners related to wildfire smoke for COVID-19 patients. While the CDC's recommendations focused on the actions individuals could take to prevent impacts to their own health, the guidance underscores the need to prevent conditions that would exacerbate the significant carbon emissions and particulate dispersal as a result of a catastrophic wildfire. During the initial stages of COVID-19, some regions issued guidance that prescribed fires, which are used as a tool to mitigate wildfire risk by reducing buildup of fine fuels, should be discontinued. NCBA understood the motivation to decrease immediate impacts to those suffering from respiratory impacts at that time, and accordingly urged agencies to continue to conduct fuels management activities using tools that would not have the same kind of particulate output. In cases where landscapes would have been close to a municipality and prescribed fire was delayed or cancelled, grazing should be considered as a prime replacement. As the Committee continues to engage with federal and state agencies, we urge you to highlight the use of grazing as a nimble, targeted natural resource management tool.

While grazing is unquestionably a natural resource management tool, it is also a cornerstone activity for rural economies and American food security. As we look to the end of summer and early autumn, public lands ranchers will need the same level of attention and investment from Congress and federal agencies. Western cattle producers often manage their operations to calve in the spring when the weather is beginning to clear, and ship cattle to the next production phase in the fall. According to our producers who sold cull cattle or other stock this spring, expected prices dropped between 30 and 50 percent. Given the production impacts this year prior to and during calving season, many of these normal production targets were interrupted. Some cattle producers are holding their cattle back to account for previous delays further down the production cycle, but in order to hold these cattle back from the next phase of production, they need somewhere for those cattle to graze. For producers who hold grazing permits on federal allotments, this means that they will move their cattle from the allotment at the specified time, based on the permit conditions, and will feed their cattle until such a time that the cattle may be able to move to the next phase in the production cycle.

There may be a need for access to additional forage, including vacant allotments or other available allotments that were not grazed during the summer season. NCBA and our partners have worked with Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide emergency access to acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program, highlighting the parallel between the economic impacts of a natural disaster like flood or fire and a global pandemic. We are thankful for the leadership of Senators Thune, Ernst, and Smith in this effort, and although the bill is not in this Committee's jurisdiction, I urge Members of this Committee to support the effort.

Congress, and this Committee, have the opportunity to take parallel action for federal allotments as well; across the West, hundreds of allotments that are likely suitable for livestock grazing stand idle. For every season these lands are ungrazed and unutilized, the risk of catastrophic

³ CDC "Wildfire Smoke and COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions and Resources for Air Resource Advisors and Other Environmental Health Professionals", June 5, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/smoke-faq.html>

wildfire increases. Grasses and fine forbs build up. Native perennial grasses are crowded out. Ground-dwelling species lose habitat. When the landscape does burn, often it burns so hot and so fast that organic matter is sterilized and regrowth potential is severely limited. This Committee is acutely aware of the challenges facing land managers and ecosystems in post-fire remediation. The best possible scenario is prevention. In California alone, there are hundreds of vacant allotments⁴, and California is not unique. Most of these allotments are inactive and unavailable because the agencies have failed to keep pace with the assessments required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We know that NEPA analysis is an important tool that allows land managers to make management decisions about a particular ecosystem. This Committee has the opportunity to provide improved legislative tools to allow the agencies to undertake more efficient NEPA that accounts for a more comprehensive ecosystem view, or to employ specialized NEPA completion teams. The Committee, and Congress, also has the ability to direct agencies to utilize contractors to conduct NEPA, which has been an approach employed by agencies in NEPA analysis for other land use activities. Grazing and management of potential allotments should be no different.

Another issue of grave importance is the rise of recreational use of public lands. First and foremost, ranchers recognize and wholeheartedly endorse the concept of multiple use of public lands. The principle of multiple-use management is at the core of the statutory and ideological principle by which 650 million acres of federal land is managed in this country. Throughout COVID-19, there have been multiple reports that a public with a dramatic and abrupt increase in time at home led to a dramatic increase in recreational use of these lands, after the initial lockdown. As Americans searched for any opportunity to safely get outside and recreate while maintaining responsible social distancing, lands and natural resources were the obvious choice for many.

Ranchers are often the first line of welcome for those seeking to enjoy the lands ranchers have caretaken for so long, but this increased use has consequences. New users may be unaware of the rules, and other users ignore signage because enforcement officials are not on hand. Those who are unaware or simply unwilling to follow good practice have impacted both the health of landscapes and other users. Ranchers see the impacts when large volumes of recreational vehicles ignore signage, encircling critical watering holes used by livestock and wildlife alike. Off-road vehicle use and new “trails” affect soil quality and forage health. These effects, while caused solely by recreation and other users, do not affect the ability of recreationalists to access these lands. The ultimate price for these impacts is paid grazing permit holders. These permittees are held accountable for range condition on a regular basis, and as the only quantifiable use on any given allotment, are often saddled with all of the economic and regulatory burden associated with impacts they had no way to prevent.

Multiple-use management is an important principle, and this Committee must be aware of the distribution of impacts, particularly as Congress is poised to abdicate their authority and involvement in the increase of the federal estate through conversation of funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Federal lands are a key portion of our nation’s identity, and user conflicts will only continue to grow as federal agencies are allowed to dramatically expand their

⁴ Forest Service Recessions Schedule, 2020.

land holdings. These impacts and their associated costs must not be balanced on the back of the American rancher.

Finally, it must be said that the COVID-19 crisis has only served to further illustrate the critical role that federal grazing permit holders play in managing the federal estate. As the American economy ground to a halt, and federal agencies implemented plans to reduce or eliminate all non-essential in-person services, Western ranchers answered the call. No matter the extenuating circumstances, cattle and sheep must be fed. Water sources must be maintained. Throughout the most pivotal moments, including the current pandemic, more than 250 million acres of the federal estate was still stewarded by the ranchers that depend on it for their livelihood. This is the true legacy of 22,000 federal grazing permit holders. No matter the conditions, these men and women care for this resource as if it is their own, and while all other services ceased, their efforts did not. From the most fundamental need for food security, to the dollars that remain in rural communities as a result of agriculture production, to cost savings for the American taxpayer by avoidance of costs associated with catastrophic wildfire, public lands grazing does it all.

Today, we have a unique story to tell. Throughout COVID-19, industries – including those at this table – have come to Congress to ask for sizeable financial and regulatory assistance. Public lands grazers have certainly faced challenges, and will continue to do so for years to come. Despite these challenges, ranchers were on the land, managing the forage, ensuring wildlife had water and forage. Ranchers were the ones ensuring the local feed mills, shops, and fuel pumps had continuous business. We fix fence, roads, water features. We are the eyes and ears on the landscape. We are reliable. We are consistent. We are essential.

As the Committee considers future policy long after COVID has subsided, I urge the Committee to remember that while it may be tempting to develop policy and chase novel uses of public lands, public lands grazers give more back to the landscape than they consume.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee and for the Members' continued commitment to healthy public lands.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Lane.
Mr. Shafroth, welcome to the Committee.

**STATEMENT OF WILL SHAFROTH, PRESIDENT & CEO,
NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION**

Mr. SHAFROTH. Thank you, Chair Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin, other members of the Committee who may be here virtually, I'm Will Shafroth, President and CEO of the National Park Foundation, the official philanthropic partner of the National Park Service. Today, five months into a global pandemic, it remains difficult to gauge the full impact COVID-19 will have on those who work for, in or near our parks, as well as the millions of Americans for whom national parks are an important destination. Especially in the throes of a global pandemic, we must all work together to support the National Park Service's mission to ensure our parks remain accessible to current and future generations.

During the past five months the National Park Foundation has done its best to adapt to the changing times caused by COVID-19 by providing new and expanding existing support for parks. As the pandemic unfolded, the national parks suddenly became less accessible to most Americans. In response, the Foundation worked with the Park Service to develop new ways to bring parks to America's homes through digital experiences, enhanced virtual tours and webcams and auditory experiences like PARKTRACKS have allowed people to tune into the sites and sounds of national parks from anywhere. On the Foundation website we've added more content, including virtual Junior Ranger booklets, instructions to earn a Girl Scout 19th Amendment badge and even a way to virtually explore Alexander Hamilton's journey through our national parks once you watch the musical. As in-person park visitation resumes, we must also educate visitors about some of the new norms. The Foundation is actively involved in the #RecreateResponsibly campaign which urges those who visit parks and other public lands to do so in the safest possible manner. Some important messages that this campaign is conveying include, "Know Before You Go," "Pack Out What You Pack In" and be prepared with a mask, hand sanitizer, food and water.

As a part of our mission, the Foundation works to support non-profit park partners and there are more than 450 of these groups that generated an aggregate revenue of more than \$1.2 billion in 2018. Revenue from these partner groups generally falls into two categories: philanthropy and earned revenue. As parks closed to protect public health, groups reliant on earned revenue began to face immediate challenges as funds to pay for salaries and overhead dried up overnight. And even with the reopening of parks, business remains down and support for park education efforts in some parks has diminished. On the philanthropic side, most organizations continue to raise money for parks, just not as much as before the pandemic. For example, many organizations were forced to cancel large, in-person fundraising events which can provide a meaningful share of a group's annual revenue.

Further, some donors shifted the focus of their giving to COVID-related causes while others are in a wait and see posture until there's more certainty in the direction of the economy. To support

the park partner community during this unprecedented time, the Foundation in partnership with the Friends Alliance, quickly moved to provide educational and technical assistance resources including hosting webinars for friends groups on navigating the PPP loan process, sharing experiences across the Friends Community on what was working in fundraising and convening park partners with NPS leadership to stay abreast of emerging issues and priorities for the Park Service. For its part, the National Park Foundation has stayed in the market, if you will, with our fundraising efforts. We haven't stopped asking people for money, basically. And while donations from individuals and foundations have remained fairly strong, our work with some corporate partners, especially those that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, has been put on, have been put on hold. And because national parks are deeply loved and a core part of the American DNA, I'm confident that those who love our parks will continue to support them.

As most in the partner community struggle to thrive during this challenging time, it's very exciting we also stand at the precipice of the enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act. And I'd like to thank members of this Committee for your support and leadership as this historic legislation will provide much needed funding for deferred maintenance in our national parks. We at the Foundation and the partner community, in general, stand ready to help implement this once-in-a-lifetime legislation. With increased federal investment to address the park's long overdue maintenance needs, the partner community can continue to focus its efforts on funding innovative projects that enhance the visitor experience and ensure our parks reach their highest potential.

I'd like to close with one parting thought. We're truly all in this together. For our parks to thrive, all of us in the park community need to work together—the Park Service, the National Park Foundation, local and national partners and gateway communities. Congress has already taken really important steps for which we all in the community are grateful, and we look forward to continue to work with you to do even more. Thank you for your time today, and I'll welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Shafroth follows:]

TESTIMONY OF
WILL SHAFROTH
PRESIDENT & CEO, NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION
Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
July 23, 2020

“The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Users of Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks”

Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin, members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing today on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on public lands, forests, and national parks and inviting me to testify. My name is Will Shafroth and I am the President and CEO of the National Park Foundation, the official philanthropic partner of the National Park Service.

Chartered by Congress in 1967, the National Park Foundation was founded on a legacy that began more than a century ago, when private citizens from all walks of life acted to establish and protect our national parks. Today, the National Park Foundation carries on that tradition as the only national charitable nonprofit whose sole mission is to directly support the National Park Service. Working together with the National Park Service and a dedicated community of passionate park champions, the National Park Foundation strives to ensure that all people are able to discover their own personal connections to national parks, because these places don’t just stand for where America has been—but inspire where we go next.

Unfortunately, had you invited me to testify before this committee about the status of parks, gateway communities, tourism, and philanthropic partners in January, I would likely have painted a much more optimistic picture than I will today. One commonly reported statistic is that in 2019, according to the National Park Service, approximately 328 million park visitors spent an estimated \$21 billion in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands across the country. These expenditures supported a total of 341,000 jobs, \$14.1 billion in labor income, and \$41.7 billion in economic output in the national economy.¹

As we sit here today, seven months into 2020, five months into a global pandemic, it remains difficult to gauge the full impact that COVID-19 will have on those who work in and near our parks. However, I can say with confidence, because of our mission, and the dedicated partners who support them, national parks themselves will be here for good. Even in the throes of a global pandemic, the National Park Service and, by extension, the National Park Foundation are obligated to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of current and future generations. Simply put, national parks are forever.

I know that there will be questions from the committee, and rightly so, regarding the impact of park closures on visitation, the visitor experience, and other issues of note that have taken place during the pandemic. I represent the Foundation, not the National Park Service, and defer any questions outside of our scope of work to my accomplished counterparts at the National Park Service or the Department of the Interior.

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>

Park Visitation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Although official National Park Service visitation numbers for all park units in 2020 are not currently available, some parks are able to provide optional monthly visitor counts.² In Alaska, the situation appears particularly dire, with Glacier Bay National Park reporting an 83.24 percent reduction in visitation as of April, and Kenai Fjords National Park reporting an 85.21 percent reduction in total visitation as of May. On the other end of the spectrum, New River Gorge National River in West Virginia reported only a 1.83 percent decline in visitation for the month of May from the year prior, and a 9.58 percent decline in visitation year to date.

In addition to official National Park Service statistics, the U.S. Travel Association recently released a report³ showing visitation at a few national park units returning to pre-pandemic levels. According to data aggregated from cell phones, more than two-thirds of visitors travelled from out of town to reach a park unit, and more than half travelled 200 miles or more to reach these parks.

We may never have an accurate depiction of the visitation statistics and patterns for 2020, as necessarily, during the early months of the year, most Americans remained at home, with visitation likely low in most units. Moreover, the National Park Service, during this time must turn their focus to the health and safety of visitors and employees. With many employees and volunteers teleworking, obtaining accurate data in the field likely presents particular challenges for the 2020 season. As more Americans begin to travel, visitation patterns will likely remain fluid, with numbers continuing to fluctuate depending upon conditions at individual park units. However, the focus for the National Park Service, Foundation, and individual partner organizations for the foreseeable future will remain on the health and safety of visitors and employees. It may not be 2021 until we have an accurate picture of what the “new normal” looks like in terms of visitation in our national parks.

The Visitor Experience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, many states and local governments issued stay at home orders that included options or even encouraged outdoor recreation or exercise. During this time many Americans turned to the outdoors as a valuable venue for stress relief and healing during a time of great uncertainty across our society.

Recognizing that national parks became less accessible to many, especially in the earliest days of the pandemic, the Foundation looked for ways to bring parks to people at home. In collaboration with the National Park Service, the Foundation has been a leader in bringing parks to people through digital experiences, and moved quickly to offer even more virtual park offerings in response to COVID-19.⁴ Such offerings include virtual tours and webcams⁵, free educational

²<https://irma.nps.gov/STATS/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Monthly%20Public%20Use?Park=ACAD>

³ <https://www.ustravel.org/news/americans-are-hitting-roads-and-heading-national-parks>

⁴ <https://www.nationalparks.org/parks-at-home>

⁵ <https://www.nationalparks.org/connect/blog/take-virtual-visit-national-park>

activity booklets for families⁶, and auditory experiences like PARKTRACKS, which allows people to tune into the sounds of national parks from anywhere.⁷

This year's celebration of National Park Week coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Foundation and the broader national park community, including members of this committee⁸, embraced the #FindYourVirtualPark message⁹ by bringing the beauty and wonder of parks to people digitally.

I encourage members of the committee (and any of your children and grandchildren) and your constituents to visit nationalparks.org for additional options such as virtual Junior Ranger booklets that can be printed and completed at home, instructions to earn a Girl Scout 19th Amendment Badge, and even a way to virtually explore Alexander Hamilton's journey through our national parks after you watch the musical.

As in-person park visitation resumes, the Foundation is actively collaborating with the National Park Service as well as corporate partners and other entities on the #RecreateResponsibly campaign¹⁰, which urges those who choose to visit parks now and in the future to do so in the safest possible manner.¹¹

Among others, core #RecreateResponsibly tenets include knowing before you go by checking individual park websites for information regarding closures or limited services and facilities, practicing social distancing, packing in and packing out necessary food or supplies, and limiting high-risk activities to reduce the likelihood of injury and the need for emergency medical response.

National Park Foundation's Response to COVID-19

Much like the National Park Service, as well as nonprofit and for-profit organizations across the globe, the Foundation was forced to rapidly adapt its operations in response to the pandemic. From the early days of the pandemic to this very moment, the National Park Foundation's primary focus has been on the health and safety of its employees as we explore new ways to accomplish our mission, primarily in a virtual environment.

The Foundation prides itself on being a nimble organization. Prior to the pandemic, many of the Foundation's activities—programmatic or otherwise—took place in person. Like its engagement with the park community, the Foundation also shifted to virtual platforms in engaging donors and corporate partners. The Foundation's board meetings, all-staff updates, and other routine activities are now conducted virtually. Newer technologies, while far from perfect, do allow us a degree of business continuity that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago.

⁶ <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/05-08-2020-junior-ranger-railroad.htm>

⁷ https://findyourpark.com/about/news/parktracks?_ga=2.101801153.1739016871.1594903764-1268492069.1555952959

⁸ <https://www.nationalparks.org/about-foundation/newsroom/national-park-foundation-celebrates-presidential-proclamation-and>

⁹ <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/04-14-2020-national-park-week.htm>

¹⁰ <https://www.recreateresponsibly.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.nationalparks.org/about-foundation/newsroom/return-parks>

Because the National Park Foundation exists to encourage private gifts to benefit the National Park Service, this begs the obvious question: how did COVID-19 impact the Foundation's ability to fundraise? Again, I would point to our ability to remain nimble, creative, and most importantly, to listen to our donor community. NPF is on track to meet many of its annual revenue targets.

This pandemic will have long-term implications on how we conduct much of our fundraising work. Stewardship remains a top priority; however, as we establish a new "normal," it is important that we continue solicitation and cultivation efforts. Now is the time to connect with our donors and prospects—finding pathways that help them further the causes and priorities that matter to them most.

Many Americans are experiencing unforeseen financial losses during the pandemic, and NPF has exercised sensitivity with donors during this time. Thanks to the insights and advice of financial experts, board members, donors, and prospects, we now know that some are beginning to resume temporarily postponed financial planning conversations, which can and do include philanthropy.

As fundraisers, our job is to determine people's willingness to invest philanthropically in the National Park Foundation and help donors align their passion with national park priorities. We anticipate shifts in philanthropic focus for many of our prospects and donors, and we are prepared to present new opportunities—ones that speak to emerging priorities in response to this pandemic.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Park Partner Community

The Foundation's Congressional Charter directs the organization to "provide support, national consistency, and management-improvement suggestions for local nonprofit support organizations."¹² Part of our core work includes a community partnership staff whom provide support for the over 450 park partner organizations (often referred to as "friends groups") that support national parks across the nation. The park partner community collectively reported an aggregate revenue of approximately \$1.2 billion in 2018, an increase of 30 percent from just five years prior. Slightly more than 10 percent of these groups report annual revenue over \$1 million. Park partners provide a range of vital services from fundraising and contracting large-scale restoration projects, to managing volunteers completing clean ups and trail restoration, to providing concert and performance programming at parks.

Revenue for partner groups generally falls into three categories: philanthropy and earned revenue, or a blend of the two. Earned revenue can come from a variety of sources, such as running field institutes and youth programs, or sales from a bookstore inside a visitor center. There is no singular model for a park partner organization, as they tend to fit the needs of the park unit. In late March and early April, the Foundation began to hear from numerous partner organizations that the situation in the field was increasingly uncertain. As the American public began to "shelter in place" and visitor centers in parks and schools closed to protect public safety, those groups most reliant on earned revenue generally felt the most painful and immediate impacts.

¹² 54 U.S.C. 101120

For example, a large, well supported partner organization recently made the difficult decision to lay off most of their staff, leaving only a part-time Executive Director in place. Another large organization recently reported that the lack of earned revenue continues to significantly impact operations. Although this organization received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, which allowed it to retain employees for several additional months, it also had to concurrently retool its entire business model with limited operational dollars, while considering new revenue models such as e-commerce and virtual programming and interpretation. Such retooling, while important, requires significant investments of both time and money. Other organizations that traditionally rely on philanthropy have needed to cancel annual fundraisers, which often serve as their primary fundraising mechanism in a given year. Some organizations have found ways to refocus on virtual fundraising, with varying degrees of success. In addition to these concerns, some groups report increased visitation in park units as visitors seek to get outside and recreate responsibly, which only increases the need for a partner's services without ensuring them a guaranteed revenue stream.

In response to these challenges, the Foundation offered additional outreach to impacted park partners. Action items included hosting webinars on navigating the PPP loan process, establishing best practices during a crisis, and shared experiences on fundraising. The Foundation also began a series of virtual forums with park partners, convening National Park Service leadership with partners in the field to discuss emerging issues in real time.

Great American Outdoors Act

In the midst of so many challenges across the National Park System, the Foundation has been grateful to see significant progress toward enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act into law. I'd like to personally thank members of this committee for your support and leadership in the Senate, as this historic legislation, combined with the work of the Foundation, will provide much needed funding for deferred maintenance in our national parks.

This funding could not come at a more important time, as individual park units, park partner organizations, and gateway communities have faced reduced revenue over the last few months while looking into an uncertain future. While it is not a jobs bill in the classic sense, the Great American Outdoors Act will support projects that provide opportunities in the design, planning, engineering, and construction sector across our country.

Beyond those vital benefits, the Great American Outdoors Act will allow the Foundation to focus on what it does best—adding a margin of excellence for our parks that the National Park Service alone cannot provide. With increased federal investment to address our parks' long overdue maintenance needs, the Foundation and its fellow park partners can refocus on funding innovative projects that enhance the visitor experience and ensure our parks reach their highest potential.

Conclusion

Like the rest of our society, the Foundation, our partners at the National Park Service, and park partners across the nation have and continue to face considerable challenges in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the National Park Foundation has maintained operational continuity while being nimble in adapting our programmatic, philanthropic, and capacity-building

functions to a virtual landscape. The philanthropic climate has certainly changed, and we have marginally revised our forecasts to reflect a different economy than we had at the start of this year.

But the fact remains: national parks are beloved and a core aspect of the American DNA. I am confident that those who love our parks will continue to respond, particularly in this moment of need. The Foundation's work is more important now than ever. We take that responsibility with great seriousness.

I would like to leave you with the parting thought that is routinely said, though perhaps not enough: we are truly all in this together. If we want to ensure that our parks, their philanthropic partners, and gateway communities survive a global pandemic, we all must unite now, closer than we ever have before, and work together. Congress has taken important steps already, for which the entire park community is extremely grateful, and I look forward to working with you as we do even more. I appreciate your time today and welcome your questions.

ADDENDUM: Background on the National Park Foundation & Its Ongoing Impact

As the official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service, the National Park Foundation generates private support and builds strategic partnerships to protect and enhance America's national parks for present and future generations. The success of the National Park Foundation is intrinsically tied to the passion, engagement, and contributions of its board of directors, many donors, and corporate partners.

In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, the National Park Foundation supported the National Park Service with close to \$85 million in grants, program support and in-kind contributions, reaching more than 400 national park service units and trails.

Highlights of the Foundation's work during fiscal years 2018 and 2019 include:

- Creating and enhancing recreational access on the Snake River in Grand Teton National Park and at 22 river and trail sites across the country in support of the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails and Wild & Scenic Rivers Acts;
- Renovating visitor centers at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield and the Statue of Liberty National Monument;
- Purchasing and working to preserve the birth and life homes of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to anchor Atlanta's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park;
- Contributing nearly \$5 million in funding for service corps that improve trails and campgrounds across the nation; and
- Investing in facilities and interpretation at newer national park units including Flight 93 National Memorial, Katahdin Woods and Water National Monument, and Pullman National Monument.

More recently, in fiscal year 2020, the Foundation has:

- Secured \$7.8 million for the replacement of visitor centers at Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument and Badlands National Park to reduce the infrastructure needs in those parks and enhance the visitor experience;
- Raised \$10 million for the renovation and restoration of the Jefferson Memorial; and
- Deployed \$2 million to enhance the Gardiner visitor entrance at Yellowstone National Park to facilitate a better visitor experience.

African American History

During a time when national attention is focusing on African American history and heroes more broadly, the National Park Foundation is proud to expand upon its previous work, decades in the making, to connect all Americans to the role of African Americans in our history and society. Through a generous donation from the Fund II Foundation, the National Park Foundation is contributing to this movement by restoring and preserving key sites that honor the African American experience and tell the fuller story of our nation. The long-term vision of this work is to fully restore and enhance select sites with sustainable facilities and digital immersive programming that focuses on the ideals of history and freedom while celebrating African American history and

culture. Current approved sites include Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, Booker T. Washington National Monument, Camp Nelson National Monument, Carter Woodson National Historic Site, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, Freedom Riders National Monument, Harriet Tubman National Historical Park, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park, Pullman National Monument, Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, and Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted some work at these sites. For example, the National Park Service acquired the Life Home of the King Family located in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 8, 2019, through philanthropic support from the National Park Foundation. With this new acquisition, the National Park Service began planning for extensive oral histories with family, friends, and community members who played important roles within the Civil Rights movement and the King family. Collecting and preserving oral histories about the King family and the Life Home is essential and timely. In light of the pandemic and rapidly evolving CDC guidance, the National Park Service's oral history efforts have shifted to conducting socially distanced interviews that ensure the safety of all participants.

Open OutDoors for Kids

COVID-19 notwithstanding, transportation continues to be one of the greatest accessibility barriers for allowing young people to experience national parks. To address this challenge, the National Park Foundation has invested more than \$10 million in transportation grants to connect more than one million 4th graders from Title I and other underserved schools across around the country with national parks and other public lands. Importantly, based on surveys of our grantees, many of the children are visiting national parks and public lands for the first time. We've also allocated resources to twelve focus cities: Atlanta, Baltimore, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, Madison-Milwaukee, Miami, New York City, St. Louis, St. Paul, Seattle, and Washington, DC. Focus city funding allows parks to collaborate and leverage capacity with their surrounding communities to scale up programming and develop additional partnerships. Program highlights include:

- The Anchorage Alaska Public Lands Information Center brought more than 100 students from the Anchorage School District for three days of place-based experiential learning in the outdoors from field professionals on subjects from forestry and plants to salmon and watersheds.
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park partnered with James A Garfield National Historic Site to connect more than 3,000 students from Cleveland and Akron bringing the history of the river and Ohio to life.
- Canyonlands National Park hosted more than 700 students to experience the ecologically diverse outdoor classroom of Southeastern Utah.

Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque

In April 2015, NPF and NPS kicked off the Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque public education and engagement campaign, which continues today. Fully funded by corporate partners, the

campaign utilized those partnerships, earned and donated media, NPS and celebrity storytellers, members of Congress, social media, and other technology to engage Americans with their national parks. The goal of Find Your Park is to increase visitation to our national parks with a focus on multicultural millennials and families with young children. The Find Your Park/Encuentra Tu Parque campaign is just one example of how the Foundation is actively working to engage the next generation of national park champions, ensuring these special places thrive for another century.

The campaign has been a resounding success, measured by the record visitation to national parks and more than 15 billion views of Find Your Park social media content, including the Find Your Park hashtag and publicly-generated stories. Across NPS and NPF organizational social media accounts, we've seen 1.8 million new followers in recent years. These channels in and of themselves attract and educate visitors through stunning pictures as well as important safety information for visiting parks during COVID-19.

In June, the Foundation launched a "Thank You" spot expressing gratitude to national park rangers and employees who work tirelessly during COVID-19 to keep the parks ready for our return. People consider parks a place for renewal, comfort, and peace. A tremendous amount of work goes into keeping the parks ready for visitors, and NPF and our FYP corporate partners thought it was important to acknowledge them with a message of gratitude. The spot is running on Hulu, Vice, Oprah.com, and YouTube, among other online outlets through mid-summer. The campaign will transition into spots that feature the rich and diverse jobs that National Park Service employees do, thus featuring the diversity of the parks themselves. This campaign is expected to generate 14 million impressions.

Natural Resources & Habitat Conservation

The National Park Foundation maintains a robust natural resources and habitat program dating back to its 1967 Congressional Charter. Despite the pandemic, work continues on many priority projects, including the following examples:

- *Natural Resources Conservation Initiative:* The Foundation continues to work with the National Park Service's Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate to develop its natural resource program. Although COVID-19 has delayed this process, individual projects have continued to progress. Staff are working with regional staff, superintendents, and park natural resource chiefs to gather information on natural resource priorities within the parks.
- *Yellowstone National Park Golden Eagles Study:* The Foundation continued to support Yellowstone Forever for the 10th and final year of golden eagle habitat, prey, and tracking studies. Golden eagles were previously unstudied and unmonitored in Yellowstone. A species of conservation concern, 2011 surveys noted that the park included a sizeable population of golden eagles. This finding led the park to determine it may serve as a refuge for threats that impact the species across the West. In partnership with the University of Montana, the ten-year program is providing the park with information on this species to guide park management decisions on what additional conservation measures may be necessary.

- *Glacier National Park Bison Reintroduction:* For nearly 150 years, Glacier National Park has been without bison, a native keystone species and key contributor to grassland diversity. The National Park Service, Wildlife Conservation Society, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Blackfeet Tribe will study the greater Glacier National Park habitat, its species, and cultural resources in preparation for the return of bison to the landscape. The Foundation granted \$200,000 to this effort for habitat studies, a cultural resource survey, and a condition assessment. These findings will be critical to understanding landscapes and the impacts of this keystone species on the local environment.
- *Everglades National Park Bonneted Bat Monitoring:* The Foundation provided a grant to Everglades National Park for population studies on the endemic and federally-listed Florida bonneted bat. The distribution and habits of this species are not well documented, but they are known to roost in both natural structures such as tree cavities, and man-made structures such as buildings. This research will help inform future management decisions for infrastructure projects at the park to better protect and encourage bat population growth.
- *Everglades National Park Wildlife Signage:* The Foundation awarded a grant to Everglades National Park for new signage designed to protect critical species and address emerging challenges, including a rising American crocodile population (formerly endangered), an increase in flocks of wading birds, and increased recreational activity. As the American crocodile population continues to increase in south Florida, female crocodiles are increasingly building nests near parking lots and roadsides. Signs will be placed as needed to slow traffic and protect female crocodiles that may remain in the vicinity of their nest and are thus in danger of being hit by vehicles. Large flocks of wading birds that nest and feed in ponds and mudflats are also at great risk of being hit by vehicles. Signs will be placed where birds are foraging to help slow traffic and protect their population.

Youth Service Corps Projects

The National Park Foundation is an active partner and grantee in youth service corps. In 2019, NPF granted over \$3.5 million service corps for projects at 30 national park sites around the country. These projects worked to support more than 420 miles of trail building and maintenance, protect the habitat of 14 species, plant 71,600 trees and other types of vegetation, and restore 190 miles of waterways.

The National Park Foundation, working with corporate sponsors and private individuals, planned a robust investment in youth service corps for the 2020 season. These activities, which typically take place in the summer months, were temporarily placed on hold as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the country. All service corps stakeholders collaborated to ensure safe environments, if possible, for participants. In some cases, issues like a lack of socially distant housing, limited opportunities for certain corps this season. However, after robust engagement, 31 of 43 Foundation-supported service corps projects are now moving forward in calendar year 2020, representing an investment of nearly \$2.9 million, with the remaining to begin in 2021, for a total investment of \$3.8 million. Of this total, \$2.7 million represents philanthropic donations, with \$1.147 from the Foundation's Centennial appropriation, a greater than 2:1 ratio in terms of federal matching requirements.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Shafroth.
Ms. Turner, welcome to the Committee.

**STATEMENT OF JESSICA (WAHL) TURNER, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE**

Ms. TURNER. Thank you.

Dear Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin and members of the Committee, thanks for having me here today to discuss the many impacts COVID-19 is having on public land and water users and especially the outdoor recreation business user community who rely on these special places as the backbone of our economic force. ORR is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation trade associations, totaling 32 national members, representing over 110,000 outdoor businesses and covering the entire spectrum of outdoor recreation activities. Prior to the pandemic, we generated \$778 billion annually, comprised 2.2 percent of the U.S. GDP and supported 5.2 million American jobs. At a time of unprecedented economic growth, we grew faster than the entire economy in every single indicator, surpassing other key sectors.

However, our industry has dramatically changed this year. Because of the COVID-19 outbreak and the ensuing efforts to mitigate the spread, including social distancing, travel restrictions, caps on group sizes, retail and public lands closures, outdoor businesses have gone through unprecedented downturns and many are still in danger of going out of business. Entire supply chains have been disrupted and, as the Chairwoman mentioned, recreational businesses who provide seasonal opportunities and oftentimes rely on seasonal trips and travel should have seen a very busy spring and early summer and, instead, were shuttered along with the local, state and federal land closures. Eighty-eight percent of our businesses surveyed in May laid off or furloughed employees; 94 percent saw a decrease in revenue; and astonishingly, all 23,000 businesses surveyed were experiencing difficulty with production and distribution, with 79 percent experiencing significant impacts. According to the U.S. Census Bureau our industry was the second most affected sector in the entire country, behind food and accommodation.

While our businesses have been reeling from the economic shock and shifting to support PPE production and emergency response efforts, Americans' lives and communities have also dramatically changed. With schools, movie theaters, malls and more temporarily closed, Americans are returning to the outdoors to provide a necessary reprieve from the intense mental and physical stress caused by the pandemic and the vital efforts to combat it. In past years less than 50 percent of Americans have enjoyed an outdoor recreation experience, and yet a May survey found that 81 percent of Americans said they'd spent time outside during the pandemic and would continue to do so after. Metro areas measured park visitation increases ranging from 6 to 145 percent. So similar to past recessions, Americans are focusing on their priorities. People want to safely get outside with their families where transmission rates of the virus are lower. There's no better place than in a park, on a river, in a boat, camping in an RV, or on a hiking, biking, off-roading trail to do this. Recent data reflects this desire. So biking,

fishing license sales in state, power sports, boat and RV sales have all rebounded since our last survey in May, and we're watching the demographics shift to younger and first-time buyers.

We've proved to be a resilient industry, but we are not in the clear yet. With more people heading outside and the overcrowding of some federal sites, we must also focus on the communities who could not access the outdoors in a time when they needed it most. As governors restricted travel and encouraged residents to use local communities for walks and exercise, more than 100 million Americans were not within ten minutes of a park or a green space and parks that were accessible to them that serve a majority of people of color, average half the size and serve more than five times as many people per acre than those that serve white communities.

With rising unemployment and these access and infrastructure issues exacerbated by the pandemic, the entire recreation industry thanks you sincerely for the Great American Outdoors Act which will help build urban parks, make recreation safer and more sustainable and, of course, support rural economies and jobs. There's never been a better time to consider a recreation package to ensure that our Federal Government is investing in places and tools that can revitalize not just our economy but also our spirit. Through policies like the Recreation Not Red Tape Act, for equitable and sustainable access, the SOAR Act for flexibility of permits for struggling guides and outfitters, ski fee retention and fee waivers to support seasonal businesses and an expansion on this Committee's great conservation core work to get more youth and veterans back to work in the outdoors and recreational trails programs full funding so that the full amount of fuel taxes that motorize vehicle users pay goes to the improved access for all recreation users.

Support for resilient lands and waters and these policies mentioned will invigorate this once vibrant and now struggling industry so we can help America recover from this economic recession and get back to doing what our industry does best—stimulate local economies, put people back to work and support all Americans in their pursuit of an outdoor experience. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Turner follows:]

Jessica (Wahl) Turner
Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

**Energy and Natural Resources Committee: Hearing to Examine the Impacts
COVID-19 on Users of Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks**
Thursday, July 23, 2020; 10:00am; Dirksen Senate Office Building 366

**Statement for the Record
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable**

Dear Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Manchin and Members of the Committee:

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) is the nation's leading coalition of outdoor recreation associations — now totaling 32 national members, representing more than 110,000 American outdoor businesses and the full spectrum of recreation activities. Outdoor recreation is a major force in the American economy. Prior to the pandemic, our industry generated \$778 billion annually in economic output, comprised 2.2 percent of the United States GDP and supported 5.2 million jobs. At a time of unprecedented economic growth, we were growing faster than the economy as a whole in every indicator, surpassing other key sectors such as petroleum, coal, and computer and electronic products.

However, our industry has dramatically changed this year. With months of closures, entire supply chains have been disrupted, including manufacturing, retail, service (campgrounds, marinas, hospitality, ski resorts, guides and outfitters, etc.), distribution and more. Meanwhile, local, state and federal public lands and waters that serve as the backbone of our industry and allow people to experience the outdoors have been closed due to necessary efforts to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. While the overall impact of the outdoor recreation economy is large in scale, the sector includes thousands of small businesses vital to the health and economic well-being of their communities, many of which are in rural areas. These businesses have gone through unprecedented downturns and many are still in danger of permanent closure. Outdoor businesses often rely on seasonal trips and travel and should have seen a busy spring and early summer, but instead were shuttered. They also rely on accessibility to public lands and waters, adequate recreation infrastructure, and the certainty of distribution, manufacturing, retail and trade — all of which have been impacted.

ORR — in partnership with Oregon State University — conducted a survey in May of 21 participating national outdoor recreation trade associations, representing over 23,000 businesses with nearly 2 million employees.¹ The impacts are startling:²

- Of the businesses the survey represents, all are experiencing difficulty with production and distribution, with 79 percent experiencing significant impacts;
- 88 percent of these businesses have laid off or furloughed a portion of their workforce;
- 94 percent of outdoor industry businesses are experiencing a decrease in sales with 24 percent seeing a decrease of 50 percent or greater compared to one year ago; and
- 95 percent of outdoor industry trade associations are seeing a decrease in revenue with 26 percent seeing a decrease of 50 percent or greater compared to one year ago.

¹ Outdoor Recreation Roundtable: COVID-19 Economic Impact Study (June 9, 2020)
<https://recreationroundtable.org/orr-launches-dashboard/>

² Outdoor Recreation Roundtable: COVID-19 Economic Impact Study (June 9, 2020)

Jessica (Wahl) Turner
Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 75 percent of small businesses in the category that includes recreation are reporting large and negative effects. Overall, our category has been hit 31 percent harder than the national average, making our industry the second most affected sector in the country behind “food and accommodation.” Additionally, as many outdoor businesses were deemed “nonessential” and forced to temporarily close, small shop owners watched large retailers like Amazon, Target and Walmart gain market share on tents, bikes, camping equipment and more.

Despite these hardships, outdoor recreation companies across the country stepped up to aid first responders, healthcare workers and law enforcement. The **RV industry** provided mobile medical clinics, staging units, and living quarters for medical personnel and essential workers, many of whom are on the front lines of this pandemic. **Airstream** donated Nest travel trailers to hospitals. **Campgrounds** are providing temporary accommodations and essential products and services including food, water, laundry, fuel and more for traveling medical personnel. **Marine, motorcycle and powersports manufacturers** donated their supplies of N95 masks to local healthcare facilities, and many **marinas** are offering their slips to law enforcement to ensure swift response on the water. **Outdoor ski and snowboard brands like Burton and gear and apparel manufacturers like Outdoor Research** converted their production lines to produce masks, gowns and PPE. **The North Face** created a Resilience Fund to support rural communities dependent on recreation by providing emergency economic support, guidance, and resources for impacted businesses and nonprofits. Since its launch, more than 120 local businesses have applied for loans, and the program has returned 160 people to work in an area where unemployment was approaching 25 percent.

While businesses have been reeling from economic shock, Americans’ lives and communities have also changed dramatically this year. With schools, movie theatres, malls and more temporarily closed, Americans are turning to the outdoors to provide a necessary reprieve from the intense mental and physical stress caused by this crisis and the vital efforts to combat it.

Less than 50 percent of Americans enjoyed an outdoor experience last year³. However, a May survey found that 81 percent of Americans spent time outside during the pandemic, with 32.5 percent turning to outdoor recreation for the first time.⁴ A recent McKinsey survey on changing behaviors due to COVID-19 found 18 percent of people surveyed are spending more time outdoors, where transmission rates of the virus are lower.⁵ Metro areas experienced significant increases in park visitation. Eighteen of the 25 areas measured saw increases ranging from 6 percent (San Antonio) to 145 percent (Detroit) between mid-May and mid-July.⁶

We are also seeing increases in outdoor equipment purchases. Leisure bike sales rose 121 percent over 2019 levels in the month of March.⁷ Camping is viewed by consumers — including

³ Outdoor Foundation Study; Participation Report (January 29, 2020)

⁴ Footwear News (May 14, 2020); survey conducted by communications and public relations firm CGPR

⁵ MedRxiv “Closed environments facilitate secondary transmission of coronavirus disease 2019”

⁶ Detecting Change in Human Mobility in Parks in top 25 US metro areas; Conservation Innovation Center, Chesapeake Conservancy; Google COVID-19 Mobility Report

<http://covidmobilitymetros.cicapps.org/>

⁷ New York Times (May 18, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/nyregion/bike-shortage-coronavirus.html>; N.P.D. Group Market Research

Jessica (Wahl) Turner
Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

campers and non-campers — as the safest way to travel, with the ease of social distancing, and the desire to spend time with family and friends some of the biggest factors drawing people to the activity.⁸ This interest in safely recreating outside is reflected in RV sales. Ninety-eight percent of RVs sold in the U.S. are produced domestically,⁹ and many dealers set sales records in May and June as they watch the demographic simultaneously shift to younger first-time buyers.

The boating and fishing industries have also experienced an encouraging rebound. According to the National Marine Manufacturers Association, boat sales were up 59 percent in May compared to April, and up nine percent from pre-pandemic levels (on a seasonally-adjusted basis), reaching single-month levels not seen since 2007.¹⁰ This is especially relevant, as 95 percent of powerboats sold in the U.S. are made in America.¹¹ Fishing license sales in states across the country are also surging. In June, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reported that 100,000 more licenses have been sold to residents in 2020 than 2019.¹² In Colorado, that number is more than 90,000 new licenses over last year.¹³ In Vermont alone, sales of fishing licenses have increased 50 percent. These sales continue to contribute to important conservation funding.

These new trends throughout the industry are painting a clearer picture of what Americans value during a global pandemic. Similar to past recessions, Americans focus on their priorities, and the outdoors is clearly among them. People want to safely be outside with their families, and there is no better place than on a river, in a boat, camping in an RV, hiking, off-roading or biking. While impactful, this recent good news for the industry doesn't come close to undoing the economic damage of the spring months, and many are worried about an increase in COVID-19 cases causing another round of closures and hardships.

One of the largest looming issues is product distribution for manufacturers and the uncertainty of items like bikes being available from overseas. Some retailers in the fishing and biking space are completely out of inventory. A small RV dealer in Iowa is out of motorhomes at the same time he could be selling dozens a day. These shortages combined with overall business uncertainty and the cost of operating in safe and socially distanced workplaces are straining small businesses like never before. These businesses are the backbone of our industry and range from specialty retailers, apparel, gear and vehicle manufacturers, outfitters and guides to campground and marina operators, and are often foundational to a community's economy. This lack of product and uncertainty of resupply timelines also severely impacts the ability of the American people to enjoy responsible outdoor recreation at a time when it may be the safest form of exercise, travel, and social interaction available.

The industry has put out best practices for business safety, from manufacturers to dealers, retailers and service providers, and is at the forefront of efforts to ensure their customers recreate responsibly, especially when visiting public lands and waters. Outdoor sectors have placed ads and op-eds and distributed new public-facing guidance to ensure we are all doing what we can to

⁸ Kampgrounds of America 2020 North American Camping Report Special Report (May 11, 2020)

⁹ RV Industry Association, 2019 State Legislative Agenda

¹⁰ Boating Industry (July 16, 2020); National Marine Manufacturers Association

¹¹ National Marine Manufacturers Association, 2017 U.S. Recreational Boating Statistical Abstract, 2016 Recreational Boating Participation Study

¹² WMTV-15 (6/29/2020); Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

¹³ Colorado Public Radio (July 19, 2020); Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Jessica (Wahl) Turner
Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

limit further spread of the virus and that new recreationists know about important practices like powersports safety and Leave No Trace etiquette. Fundamentally, we see the outdoors as part of the public health solution and are making sure we are not part of the problem.

With rising unemployment and more Americans than ever are participating in outdoor recreation and recognizing the value of time spent outdoors, investments in our industry's core infrastructure – public lands and waters – will allow outdoor businesses to get back to what they do best: stimulate local economies, put people back to work, and allow Americans to benefit from time spent outside. This is why the entire outdoor recreation industry was thrilled with the recent bipartisan passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, which fully funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund and provides billions of dollars for backlogged maintenance on our public lands and waters, which we hope will revitalize communities across the country.

This spring, as Governors restricted travel and encouraged residents to use their local communities for recreation, the realization that more than 100 million people are not within ten minutes of a park or green space¹⁴ became increasingly apparent. As we look at the overcrowding of some federal lands, we must weigh that against the many communities who could not access the outdoors during a time when they needed it the most. Looking at park size and density shines a light on the disparity in access to green space. Of 14,000 cities and towns analyzed, parks serving a majority of people of color average half the size (45 acres compared to 87 acres) while serving five times as many people per acre.¹⁵

With more people heading outside, more equitable investments in access and infrastructure are needed to ensure all Americans can benefit from the mental and physical health aspects of outdoor recreation, while practicing social distancing and ensuring the safety of gateway communities and cities. The Founder and CEO of Outdoor Afro, Rue Mapp, summed it up well by saying, "I'm hoping that after this pandemic, the priority to have a connection to nature in our communities will emerge like never before. We've had a lot of park closures, but I've never seen as many people in my neighborhood walking — not just the dog walking — but whole families out walking together. This is an opportunity for us to rethink public lands and to get people out of the mind-set that nature is somewhere that you have to drive to."¹⁶ More investments in local recreation and conservation are needed so all Americans can reap the health benefits of time spent outdoors while staying close to home, and small outdoor businesses can continue to provide needed jobs and economic growth in their communities.

The outdoor industry urges you to continue to support resilient federal lands and waters, communities, economies, and healthy people by reinvigorating this once vibrant, and now struggling industry in the coming months. Our greatest needs are putting Americans back to work in the outdoor industry; increasing partnerships with federal agencies on permits, leases, contracts and data collection; ensuring small and seasonal businesses access their fair share of federal support; and improving recreation access and infrastructure. Action is needed on smart policies and investments so we can truly harness this surge in outdoor recreation and provide opportunities for improved health and quality of life for generations to come.

¹⁴ Trust For Public Land ParkScore Index (May 21, 2020) <https://www.tpl.org/parkscore>

¹⁵ Trust For Public Land ParkServe; <https://www.tpl.org/parkscore/about>

¹⁶ Trust For Public Land Special Report: Parks and the Pandemic (2020)

Jessica (Wahl) Turner
Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

Recommendations to put Recreation Businesses back on an Economic Growth Trajectory

1) Repair Crumbling Infrastructure, Invest in U.S. Manufacturing and Curb Rising Unemployment through Expanded Conservation Corps and a National Outdoor Workforce Development Consortium

To help address the rise in unemployment stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure the stability of our communities, our country needs a Corps movement similar in scale and purpose to the Civilian Conservation Corps of the New Deal Era to employ young Americans and Veterans on public lands and waters in communities across the country.

To achieve this, we can expand the nation's existing conservation corps and build upon the work this committee did to pass the John S. McCain III 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act (21CSC Act) last year. The legislation included new authorities to partner with more federal land and water management agencies and established the Indian Youth Service Corps to engage native youth on projects that benefit their tribes and communities. We recommend identifying and funding appropriate shovel-ready projects for Corps, additional resources for Corps run by and/or engaging underserved and underrepresented populations, and targeted investments in youth and workforce development to prepare participants for future employment.

Efforts should also be made to create a National Workforce Development Consortium for the Outdoor Recreation Economy. This Consortium would be aimed at providing research, national education and training standards, curriculum development, and life-long learning opportunities to support the outdoor recreation economy. This infrastructure will accelerate innovation and progress for businesses, stimulate U.S. manufacturing and strengthening rural communities. Like the Corps, the Consortium would strive to be a model of inclusivity, supporting workforce development strategies that grow equity and diversity within the outdoor industry, leading to more welcoming outdoor spaces and businesses for all. A special focus would be on retraining workers whose jobs have been eliminated or displaced due to transitioning local economies or COVID-19 in skillsets that would support a sustainable outdoor economy.

2) Waive Fees on Public Lands and Waters and Extensions of Contracts/Permits

Congress should provide the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture flexibility in their administration of contracts, permits, and other authorizations of public recreational facilities and/or services on lands and waters such as fee deferrals and waivers, contract and permit extensions, operational flexibility, and other appropriate measures to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on businesses who rely on these partnerships. This change would help countless small businesses and continue to connect Americans to safe and memorable outdoor experiences.

Passing the Recreation Not Red-Tape Act (RNR), the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act (SOAR) and the Ski Area Fee Retention Act (SAFR), would solve many of these issues and prevent future business harm from restrictions due to COVID-19 lasting another season.

3) Allow Seasonal Businesses to Apply for Retroactive PPP Assistance

During the initial months of PPP, program rules lacked flexibility to account for different peak seasons of businesses like ski areas, guides and outfitters, and more. Businesses were instructed

Jessica (Wahl) Turner
Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

to pick a recent 12-week period to determine payroll, which in turn determined how much assistance they were eligible for. Many seasonal businesses were at a low point during this period. On May 3, SBA and Treasury released new guidance allowing seasonal employers to use a 12-week period between May 1, 2019 and September 15, 2019 to calculate a maximum PPP loan. Unfortunately, seasonal businesses who had already applied for loans and whose Form 1502 had already been filed by their lender were unable to take advantage of this very important change. Seasonal businesses that find themselves in these circumstances should be able to apply for additional PPP assistance consistent with the amount they would have been allotted under the most recent guidance. The continued operation of these businesses supports employment and participation in outdoor recreation for Americans across the country.

4) Revitalize Rural Communities through Recreation by Expanded Technical and Rural Development Assistance

The 2018 Farm Bill report clarified an existing authority that Rural Development grants could be used to support the growth of recreation economies and utilized for recreation projects, technical and financial assistance, infrastructure, business loans and marketing. Similarly, the Economic Development Agency's Economic Adjustment Assistance Program 'Implementation Grants' should be used for recreation infrastructure projects (e.g. parks/trails development and renovation, playgrounds, public pools, ballfields, lodging/lodging camping facilities, etc.).

Additionally, the United States Forest Service, along with three other federal agencies, is providing assistance to 10 rural communities aimed at growing their economies through outdoor recreation. Considering that 170 communities applied for support, this bold initiative should be expanded and replicated to address the needs of distressed rural communities coming back from the pandemic, including economic development and diversification, increased quality of life, and improved public health outcomes for under-resourced communities.

5) Streamline Data Collection of Federally-Managed Lands and Waters

Federal land and water management agencies have historically conducted surveys to measure outdoor recreation visitation specific to their individual agency and have occasionally used these to estimate economic impact and jobs supported by recreation. Agencies also have broken down recreation on their lands into specific categories, but these categories are not standardized across the agencies. Because of this, a gap exists in understanding the economic impacts and jobs supported by recreation, as well as an overall picture of outdoor recreation occurring on our federal lands. This could be especially difficult for management during a pandemic where we want as many Americans as possible to enjoy time outside but need to have a more accurate depiction of what, when, and where they are participating in recreation to maintain resources and safe capacity for social distancing and positive experiences.

If an alignment existed between the federal agencies on how they surveyed for outdoor recreation and subsequent impacts, federal land managers could confidently determine where restoration for overuse is most needed, what wildlife populations need to be more closely monitored or places the federal government should focus on encouraging more visitation and communities they should connect with to support engagement. This is critical for future funding and management determinations, especially throughout the pandemic and in the aftermath with many new users hoping to enjoy the myriad of benefits our public lands and waters offer.

Jessica (Wahl) Turner
Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

Outdoor recreation has been a major force in the American economy. In order to recover from this economic recession, all efforts should be taken to support this key industry that can help communities recover, create American jobs and continue to ensure Americans' connection with the outdoors and the natural world. There has never been a better time to consider a Recreation Package made up of critical management policies like RNR, SOAR, SAFR, and Conservation Corps and workforce expansion to ensure the federal government is investing in places and tools that can revitalize not just our economy, but also our spirit.

Thank you for holding this important hearing and please consider ORR a partner in supporting public lands and waters, and the user community, throughout the pandemic and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Wahl', written in a cursive style.

Jessica Wahl
Executive Director
Outdoor Recreation Roundtable

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Turner. I appreciate what you've added in terms of some of the legislative proposals that are out there that we might be able to help advance in response. I also want to acknowledge your comments about the overcrowding. I think it is good, as we, every day try to find the bright linings of COVID-19. Some days it is more challenging than others, but we have seen families go outdoors and recreate at levels and in places that they have not before, and I think that is such an extraordinary positive.

The other observation that I would make is that the users that I have come in contact with—users of our parks, users of our public lands—have recognized that in order to use and use safely, we are accepting certain limitations that perhaps we might not have been so eager or willing to do. The example that I might share with fellow Committee members, as I mentioned, I was in Katmai National Park. Brooks Camp is where they have the infamous bear cams where you have the big, lumbering bears standing at the falls and waiting for the fish to come into their mouth and that is the most highly sought place to park your family, watch the bears for hours on end, photograph some extraordinary pictures. If you want to look at my pictures, I have got some really good ones. But people recognizing that they can't all go down to the viewing platform at the same time. A willingness to not only wait until it is their turn but recognizing that you can't get on the lower platform until people have cycled off, that there was a 20 minute, 30 minute limitation and not once did I hear somebody say, no, I paid an extraordinary amount of money to come out here to view this and it is my right to stand here. There was a recognition that we want to accommodate others. That, to me, was encouraging. I know we don't hear all the times, the good stories, but I think it is important to note that as we are trying to access our public areas that are very special to us, that we are making some accommodations and making some things work here.

I wanted to ask a question to you, probably Mr. Hepler and Mr. Shafroth, and this is the issue of the fees and a recognition that our states, I mentioned the impact on Alaska and Mr. Hepler you acknowledged that we are going to be down 90 percent in terms of those revenues that we count on. I raised that in my opening statement as well. Senator Manchin had said that he had a roundtable where he was asking, okay, what is it that we need to do, what didn't we do in CARES and what might we need to be doing going forward? What sort of relief could Congress provide to address the concerns about the non-federal matching requirements in the short-and the medium-term?

I will turn to you, Mr. Hepler, first and then we will go to you, Mr. Shafroth.

Go ahead, Kelly.

Mr. HEPLER. Thank you, Madam Chair, I appreciate that. Yeah, I spent five years as Director of Traditional Sport Fishing. It's a real challenge right now Dave and Doug have to deal with. It's, at the very least, what we're asking for, Madam Chair and Senators, is that right now it's required, it's 75/25. So you need to probably have \$25 compared from \$75 coming from the federal side. We'd like to have that down to a 90/10 and realizing this isn't asking for

more money, this is all pass-through money and hope that's really the states. And so we're asking for a 90/10 relief for at least the next two years and that will give people, like Director Russ in Alaska, a chance to rebound a little bit because I'm definitely concerned about that division because I'm not quite sure how they're going to survive. I also agree with you just because we may get a vaccine in January does not mean we're going to see the same people who get in all those cruise ships coming back to Alaska to visiting some of the other states.

So that right there would at least be a step in the right direction and we do have some other things we'd like to add but directly to your question, Madam Chair, that should help.

The CHAIRMAN. Good, I appreciate that.

Mr. Shafroth.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. It's an interesting dilemma because we've advocated strongly for the Centennial Challenge funds because frankly donors that we're seeking funding from like the fact that we're bringing federal money to the table and it inspires more contributions. And as I indicated in my testimony, the impact of COVID-19 has been uneven across the country. Some of the smaller groups have been dramatically impacted while some of the larger, more sophisticated groups, including ours, you know, we've kind of figured things out in a way. And so, I guess I would advocate for things like the Centennial Challenge funds, some additional flexibility for the Park Service to look on a case-by-case basis because some groups, the Golden Gate Parks Conservancy, they may well be able to easily meet the matching requirements where others are going to have a much more difficult time.

I'm not that familiar with some of the heritage areas, Madam Chair, but I understand that they have some specific challenges that may also require some additional flexibility.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate that.

Okay, my time has expired. I am going to vote. Senator Manchin is going to be coming back, but he is not back yet so that means that we will go to you, Senator Heinrich, and then you, Senator Barrasso.

Senator HEINRICH [presiding]. Thank you, Chairman.

I want to ask a couple of questions that will largely focus on education, and they are really for any of you. One of the things that has been a challenge is that we have a whole coterie of people who are coming and using our public lands that maybe did not do that a year ago. One of the challenges that ensues from that is that a large number of people are crowding into the front country in places where you have trails that may be narrow, and it is hard to socially distance and then we have millions of acres that are literally, practically, receiving no visitation at all. You know, when we were under the most stringent lockdown and we had, I'm trying to think, I think it was the blood moon, we had a really amazing full moon in New Mexico in the middle of that. I took my family out to a place on BLM land that I knew there would be literally no one else there. There was no one else at the parking lot, and we spent the entire evening out there and did not see another soul.

How do we do a better job educating people about where are those places that they can go that are really quite spectacular, that may have a little bit less infrastructure but try to spread the public out more given the millions of acres of public lands that we do have?

Ms. TURNER. I'll start. Thank you for that question, Senator.

You know, we've actually talked a lot. This is another good idea for a recreation package about streamlining the data collection within the federal agencies. They all have different methodology. They come out at different times. We really need to know who's on the public lands and why are they there? So, for example, if we knew what type of recreation they were participating in, we could better move people or recommend less crowded public lands. If we don't know whether they're there to hike or fish, we can't necessarily say there's a better place to go. So we really encourage this Committee specifically to look at streamlining the data collection and making that available. You know, if you Google a CVS right now you can tell when the hot spot is, when will it be crowded. It's probably going to be crowded around five o'clock. I'm going to go at noon.

How can we show the hot spots in public lands, because I know there's a lot of users who don't want to be in a crowded place, especially now? And so, I think data could help move people around very well at this time, I think.

Senator HEINRICH. And we don't want them to be—

Ms. TURNER. And we don't want them to be. The Recreate Responsibly campaign that Will mentioned is a great way to educate the user community. It's really on the American public right now to do the right thing when they're getting outside, and I think more information would help that.

And then the last thing is on our end and probably Will's end too, and that's brand marketing campaigns. I think businesses can help bring to light places that are less used—the people know less about in their marketing campaigns when people are at point of sale, talking about camping maybe in a less used area.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Thank you, Senator Heinrich.

Yeah, the issue of—there's plenty of space but we have a tendency to cram a lot of people into small spaces. I think about half of the national park visitation last year of 327 million visits happened on 25 or 30 parks. So it's both. We need to do a better job of dispersing visitation across the National Park System, and we're doing that in part through our Find Your Park campaign which was really to drive more visitation. And the joke among superintendents was "yeah, find a park, but find somebody else's park because mine's got too many people in it right now" and disperse them to some of the lesser known places. You know, there's literally almost 400 of those places that are lesser known and really compelling, many of them have to do with history and culture, but nonetheless. Your state is a great example of, you know, a lot of people probably cramming into a few of those places and the rest of the state is pretty vacant. The other part is even within parks we need to do a better job of dispersing visitation. So if you go to Yosemite and you would visit Bridalveil Falls, yeah, there's going to be a lot of people there, but if you go up to Mary's Lake up in

Towalame Meadows, there'll be almost nobody there. So that is part of an education process that we need to help do.

The other thing, and I think the Park Service is thinking about this too, which is, you know, timed entry. We need to be looking more at using technology in a more intelligent way to ensure that, you know, if you show up at a movie theater at seven o'clock on a Friday night, you don't necessarily expect to get a seat anymore, right, or a seat together with your family. We have to be thinking in the same way about our park visitation, and if you want to be at a prime spot, you may have to reserve some of those places.

Senator HEINRICH. I don't have a lot of time left, so rather than jump into another question I will make a comment and just, it is really more of a thank you to all of the user groups and industry groups who stepped in. You know, there was a moment there where even in my State of New Mexico that's so dependent on outdoor recreation and our public lands, where people were saying, I think, maybe we just need to shut these places down right now and we need to shut the roads and shut the access and people stepped up and within 24 hours there was literally a consistent communications campaign from elected leaders, from industry, from people like the new outdoor recreation specialist in our Governor's administration, all talking about, okay, we need these spaces right now, but here is how you access them responsibly. Here is how you are not a burden on someone locally, you are not a burden on other users and we are going to do this together responsibly. And in a culture where oftentimes for the last few decades we have really been about me, me, me, it was very heartening to see that and it was a great benefit for public health and also for people's mental health to continue to be able to access those places but be respectful in how they did it.

Senator BARRASSO [presiding]. Well, I am really appreciative of this hearing, and I just want to talk a little bit first about the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic on the users of our public lands and our forests, our national parks because it is extremely important, certainly to my home State of Wyoming. Although the year to date visitation in state and national parks is down in Wyoming, we have seen a substantial increase in visitors over the last couple of months as we reopened smartly, safely, sensibly, responsibly. Despite the recent increase in visitors, tourism in gateway communities and concessionaires in Wyoming truly are hurting. And you have seen this all across the country. The ski resorts had to end their seasons early. Our parks had delayed openings.

Ms. Turner, in your testimony you highlight waiving fees on public lands, extending contracts and permits as a recommendation to put recreation businesses back on the economic growth trajectory. And you know, as I understand the Forest Service has deferred various fees in light of the pandemic but they don't really have the statutory authority to forgive the fees. Could you talk a little bit how fee forgiveness and contract extension do provide relief for National Park/Forest Service concessionaires and others related to the recreational business?

Ms. TURNER. Sure, and thank you for the question, Senator.

You know, we do appreciate the Forest Service deferral. That was a big deal when we needed it most. I think there might be an-

other coming down. But fee waivers actually help businesses provide certainty. We don't know how long we're going to be in this. We don't know what the revenue is coming in. Chairman Murkowski mentioned 30 percent to 50 percent of some concessionaires. We know it's around that for some guides and outfitters as well. So this helps the guides and outfitters concessionaires to keep people employed and keep their fixed costs which haven't changed, if anything, they've gone up because of all of the new regulations they need to run their trips. So rather than sending money and fee money back to the government at an unknown cost, they're putting people to work which is important for communities like yours, rural communities in Wyoming.

It also helps create strong, resilient partnerships. I heard from the Forest Service yesterday. They said if a number of these businesses go out of business it would be unimaginable the impact. These are really the people that are helping Americans experience public lands and waters when they get to the important parks.

And then lastly, you know, for permit extensions, when folks bid on permits, they're given a certain amount of time to recoup that economic toll that they're putting in at the beginning. And so, not knowing how they're going to run a business, how they're going to open or when they're going to open can be a huge upfront cost and one that they can't carry much longer.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you.

Mr. Lane, in your testimony you noted that economists estimate the COVID-related impacts to the cattle industry, beef industry, of more than \$13 billion. As you mentioned, about 40 percent of Western cattle herd and 50 percent of the nation's sheep herd spent at least part of their production cycle on public lands. We certainly know about it in Wyoming. This statistic isn't lost on any of us considering about half of the land in my home State of Wyoming, public land, 17 million acres, public land used for livestock grazing as this pandemic and resulting slowdown of meat processing has backed up the supply chain for cattle and sheep. Is there a need for the BLM and the Forest Service to allow producers to keep their animals on the range for a longer period of time where forage is available and have the agencies allow some of this flexibility that we think is important?

Mr. LANE. So I think the key there is flexibility and being able to really look at what the conditions are in an area where we're talking about that need. You know, we are seeing that processing capacity rebound. We are making gains there, but producers are looking for where they can find additional forage to keep those cattle in a holding pattern and a lot of places in the West, especially if they had a rainy spring, might be pulling cattle off according to their terms of their grazing allotment at five percent utilization. And so we're talking about not just the fact that we're not using all the resources available, but perhaps really increasing fire risk as well. So, you know, if we can get down to a really local level of analyzing whether there's value in extending some of those terms, I think we can make some decisions that are best for the rangeland health and provide some flexibility to those permittees as well.

Senator BARRASSO. Great, thank you.

Back to Ms. Turner, among the many lessons we learned, the pandemic has highlighted the need for increased communication between various federal agencies and with Wyoming being in both the Rocky Mountain and the Intermountain regions of the Forest Service, we are no stranger to the importance of this communication. We have a case in point, a woman from Wyoming contacted our office because the bathrooms in fish cleaning stations on the Wyoming side of Flaming Gorge were not open, but just across the state line in the same park in Utah, the same facilities were open. We were told that the high traffic facilities are closed because of COVID-19 and their policy. Have you heard of similar instances? Is this just unique where the pandemic has highlighted additional needs for effective communication in state, local and national levels?

Ms. TURNER. Yup, thank you for the question.

We've heard that and we've been talking and dealing with that, I think, for decades just on more communication between the agencies both within the agencies and between the agencies. We appreciate that the Forest Service allowed for local decision-making to keep units open because that kept a lot of recreation open, but we certainly are having the same issues with businesses, oftentimes, as we've talked about guides and outfitters actually cross jurisdictional boundaries between forests or between agencies. So if one is open and the other isn't and if we look at closures happening again, that could be very difficult to run a business.

Senator BARRASSO. Well, thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chairman, for holding this important hearing.

The CHAIRMAN [presiding]. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Manchin.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you very much. All of this has been enlightening. I appreciate it very much, but I am going to ask one question to everybody.

What is the one thing that Congress, the Senate, all of us could do that would help turn around and basically recover quicker? We will come out of this pandemic sooner or later, but what is the one thing we could do now to get us to that point when we come out of this that would help your industry? We have two of our witnesses on the video, if they would like to just give me an idea of what they would think we need to do—one important thing as you think about this.

Mr. HEPLER. Senator Manchin, this is Kelly Hepler and what I'd really love to see the Senate do is to invest in the state infrastructure the same way you invested so wisely in the federal infrastructure. It's going to immediately, I think, make an impact on recreational use. I think it will help the industry. It will certainly put boots on the ground, put money in small town USA. You know, we're talking, you know, hundreds of millions of dollars into what we need for investment. Particularly like in South Dakota we have miles of roads. We have 80 dams, you know, which are important for recreational and home use, and so if you invest in that infrastructure with that same zeal you did on the federal side, you'll see those same results, maybe even amplified more. So, Senator, that's what I wish you'd do.

Senator MANCHIN. Anybody else?

Mr. KEMPER. Senator, this is Doug Kemper. I think the revenue stabilization assistance, especially to utilities and help with the smaller special districts that have just not been able to get any help from the CARES Act would be most beneficial.

Mr. LANE. Senator, I appreciate that question.

The biggest unused resource in the federal grazing arena is making grazing allotments that are subject to a never-ending NEPA backlog. There is a tremendous amount of forage available, not to mention unrealized resource benefit if we can manage those resources properly that are sitting on a shelf right now because we can't get the NEPA done or get over those NEPA hurdles to put those vacant allotments back into production.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Thank you, Senator.

I would say be generous in your appropriations to programs like the Centennial Challenge this year. When you were out of the room, we talked about having some initial flexibility there but those dollars will stimulate more activity from the 450 organizations that are out supporting parks than almost anything that you can do.

Ms. TURNER. I would have said the Great American Outdoors Act, but I checked that off yesterday. So I appreciate that.

[Laughter.]

I think a recreation package with some of the provisions that I outlined so that we have better management and tools for our recreation businesses.

Senator MANCHIN. I was in West Virginia last week, the last two weeks we were off, and then we had a virtual town hall, virtual listening session to hear all the people's concerns. The number one thing in my state from infrastructure is internet connectivity. Internet connectivity lets people stay longer and now basically they can work from anywhere, because of telework and that could continue on. It could be a new fad. I think the new normal is not going to be the old normal we knew. It has changed everything.

But connectivity, if we, all of us, Democrats and Republicans, work for one thing and especially in our rural states. I don't need to tell my Chairman here, my friend, Lisa, that this is something we are challenged with. I have kids that can't do homework, but I have other people coming in to ride the Hatfield-McCoy Trail that will stay in the cabins. They stay an extra two weeks. I have people that would stay in some of our beautiful parks out in West Virginia that would stay all summer if they could and it is just something we need. So I would speak to that.

One other thing I wanted to speak to, and this is directed to Mr. Shafroth. The question for the Park Service is, are there enough shovel-ready projects that we can do? I mean, we are going to have \$1.3 billion a year.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Right.

Senator MANCHIN. A lot of it is for backlog maintenance too, but it is going to be for some new projects that have an opportunity to really enhance the quality of that park. Are there programs that they have been working on and, kind of, just been piecemealing it for lack of funds?

Mr. SHAFROTH. Thank you, Senator, and it probably wouldn't be appropriate for me to answer for the Park Service because that's a very complicated, multiple-answer question.

Senator MANCHIN. Sure, I understand that, yes.

Mr. SHAFROTH. But that said, I am aware, having spent a lot of time with the Park Service leadership on this point, is that there are a number of projects that are——

Senator MANCHIN. As a foundation you are all looking. You are watching things all the time anyway.

[Laughter.]

Mr. SHAFROTH. I know that they have their important projects like the Grand Canyon water line that are ready to go, that are wanting for funding otherwise and I gather that they've got a number of projects, especially for the first year or so. I don't think they necessarily wanted to have five years' worth of projects ready to go until the bill passed. So I think, you know, given it's going to take a little while for the money to actually become available——

Senator MANCHIN. Yes.

Mr. SHAFROTH. ——that they are working on that.

Senator MANCHIN. Well, let me tell you what I would be looking for and I think all of us would like to have some direction from——projects that have started that have been very slow-paced because of a lack of funding. They just couldn't, you know, they continue at a snail's pace.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Right.

Senator MANCHIN. Those projects could come to completion fairly quick because they are on the move. They are moving through the process. That is what we really need to know. We need to get an accounting of that. Maybe we can request that, Madam Chairman, from the Parks to find out what projects have been in place and basically have been slowed down because of lack of funding. Those are the ones we could pick up and finish.

Thank you all very much for being here.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Manchin, we can work with you on that, that Parks list, from the appropriations perspective as well. But I do have an offer for you. I have got a project for you to look at, at Denali National Park. I have pictures that I will tease this up, but yes, we have some work to do within our Parks and that is, again, why we are looking forward to the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. Thank you for your leadership on that and for yours, Senator Daines. Congratulations as well.

Senator DAINES. Well, thank you, Chair Murkowski. It was a great vote last night in the United States House, and Senator Manchin, it was north of 300 on the positives there. It was a great, strong, bipartisan vote.

Senator MANCHIN. 310.

Senator DAINES. 310, yes, that is great.

Well, thank you for testifying today on the pandemic's impact on the users of public land. This hearing is timely as just last night the U.S. House passed the Great American Outdoors Act which will greatly benefit the users of our public lands. It is also timely as Congressional leadership and the Administration are now busy negotiating the scope of the next COVID package. And for perspective, the outdoor recreation industry which supports over 70,000 di-

rect jobs in Montana has been devastated by this pandemic which coincides with what is typically our peak season.

Outfitted tourism is down 60 percent and will continue to decline as cancellations roll in during prime summer and fall seasons. In fact, over a two-day period there is a hunting outfitter out of Big Timber. I have spent a lot of days fishing, hunting north of Big Timber as a kid growing up in Montana. They experienced a \$400,000 loss due to fall cancellations. There is another Montana outfitter who was forced to close their snowmobile business, and they face a 70 percent decline in their hunting business. That is why I introduced the Trail Stewardship for Economic Recovery Act which provides employment opportunities for struggling outfitters and guides through trail project contracts in our forests.

Ms. Turner, how does the Trail Stewardship for Economic Recovery Act benefit both small businesses, public land and public access and how are outfitters and guides uniquely qualified to do this type of work?

Ms. TURNER. Thank you for the bill, Senator, and the question.

As we've talked about a little bit here today, costs are up, trips are down and many guides and outfitters have lost a huge percentage of the time already being closed for the early months. What some people don't understand is many of these small businesses are the bedrock of rural communities and they've been shut for eight months and they have to recoup the, you know, entire year's revenue from just a short season that's already been shortened. So what this bill does is it helps keep FTEs on. It helps them bring their employees back to do important maintenance work on public lands and waters. It develops important partnerships with the federal agencies to do the stewardship work and one of the biggest things is it will keep these small businesses around for another season, hopefully many more seasons, so that they can really connect more Americans to this great outdoor experience. What they provide are safe and memorable experiences on our public lands and waters for the user community.

If you've been on a river trip, which I know you have, we just talked—on the Yellowstone, I think, fishing last week—you know there's nobody that knows a river better than a river guide. So I have full confidence that the guides and outfitters that know these lands, that have been working and running trips in these lands would be wonderful stewards for these projects and where they don't have expertise there's the core network, there's trail builders. There's so many other groups that they can rely on for some of that expertise.

Senator DAINES. Thank you.

And you know, the double whammy here is they are refunding dollars of pre-booking so they had the cash sitting in their bank accounts and now they are refunding those dollars at the same time cancellations going forward are rolling in as well. So it is just, it is absolutely the worst storm possible which, as you know, is a relatively short season, oftentimes, in Montana for those who focus more on the summer months.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, the leadership is currently negotiating the scope of the next COVID package. You stated pretty clearly, Ms. Turner, but I am going to say it and give you

a chance to state it once more, why is it absolutely imperative that outfitters and guides are not left out of this package?

Ms. TURNER. One thing I haven't mentioned is actually outfitters and guides were left out of PPP. PPP did not work for seasonal businesses. So when they needed it most, when they were starting to turn up and ramp on for their season, April-May, they couldn't get PPP based on the allotments and how they had to measure the revenue. That has been changed by Treasury but many of them have missed the window or have already applied for a much lower PPP. So really what this is, is a stimulus that many other businesses didn't get. They're going to get this now through that bill.

Senator DAINES. Thank you. That was very clear.

The pandemic has coincided with the season typically dedicated to wildfire prevention efforts and has now bled into wildfire season. The need for socially-distanced vegetation management and wildfire prevention sheds light on the effectiveness and utility of targeted public land grazing to reduce wildfire risk.

Mr. Lane, in your written testimony you spoke at length about the effectiveness of targeted grazing to reduce wildfire risks. What do you need from the agencies and from Congress to fully utilize and realize the benefits of targeted grazing to perform vegetation management?

Mr. LANE. We need the exact same kind of flexibility we were just talking about with Senator Barrasso a minute ago. We need the agencies to recognize when there is more forage available, they need to be flexible to allow those producers to stay out longer to go into those areas where we need to reduce fuel loads across a large area in the same way that they dynamically react and reduce our access to those areas when there is not enough forage available. We need that to move both directions, not just for land health but to ensure that we are managing those fuel loads in a comprehensive way. We've learned fuel breaks work where they work, but they don't work everywhere and we need that larger scale lowering of those fuel loads. And that's something that the grazing, sort of uniquely, is positioned to do.

Senator DAINES. Thank you. I am going to squeeze in one more question, Mr. Shafroth.

You know the National Parks and the gateway communities have suffered a major blow due to COVID-19 and, to add insult to injury, we just had a horrible fire in downtown Gardiner, Montana. We lost several businesses to a fire that was accidental. It happened during the afternoon and was yet another blow. How can Congress, the National Park Service and groups like yours work together to bolster our parks and the good paying jobs that go along with them?

Mr. SHAFROTH. Well, I think it's in, sort of, Senator, thank you for the question, every place is a little different, frankly. I mean, I think I was aware of the fire in Gardiner and the tragedy that ensued, but I think we have to work together to find ways to create a seamless experience in a lot of ways for people to come. So if you're going to drive 500 miles to go to your park, you need to know that you can get into the park, that there are outfitters and other concessionaires that can help you provide an experience, that there's educational opportunities for your kids. And so, I think that

requires a new level of cooperation and collaboration between and among all the different entities, public and private and non-profit in order to make that happen.

Senator DAINES. Alright, thank you.

Thank you, Chairman Murkowski.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Daines.

Senator King is with us virtually. Senator King.

Senator KING. Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank you especially for having this important hearing. I think this is a great topic for us to be discussing. I don't have much in the way of specific questions, but first I want to say, I don't think we celebrate enough when we have a success. We always focus on the next problem coming down the street. And yesterday's passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, I think, is a really significant achievement for this Congress. It is one that, to say it has been a long time coming, is an understatement and it is going to really make a difference for generations of Americans. Generations of Americans who won't know any of us who passed it, but they will see the handiwork that we brought through some hard work and cooperation and bipartisanship, all the things that our citizens hope we do.

Again, I don't really have a question. I do want to associate myself with the comments from Senator Manchin about broadband. We have learned a lot of lessons from the pandemic. We knew before the pandemic that broadband was an issue in rural areas, but since the onset of the pandemic we have realized it is not just an issue, it is a necessity. It is something that really has to be addressed in a comprehensive way just as Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed the rural electrification question in the '30s. It is exactly similar. It is absolutely critical to modern life. I just want to thank all of our witnesses for the work that they are doing and have done. I think it is prudent to try to get some provisions into the new COVID bill that is being discussed to deal with some of the specialized, particularly of seasonal businesses that have been particularly hard hit this summer. I know that is true in Maine as well as across the country.

So thank you for the hearing. I have enjoyed listening to the testimony, and we will look forward to working with you and Ranking Member Manchin and the rest of the members of the Committee to try to effectuate some of the ideas we have heard today. Thank you again, Madam Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator King.

Let's next turn to Senator Hirono.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just wanted to make a comment regarding Jess Turner's comments/testimony. In your testimony you note the importance of expanding the core opportunities to employ young Americans and veterans to work on public lands as we recover from the pandemic. I just wanted to comment that when the Senate considered the Great American Outdoors Act, I introduced an amendment to clarify that deferred maintenance projects using public-private partnerships include organizations with qualified youth and conservation corps. While that amendment did not get adopted, I will be following up with DOI and USDA to make sure that these organizations are not overlooked for these projects, because I agree with you that these

job opportunities are going to be critical to provide for our public lands while getting Americans back to work. I have met with a number of American Corps young people, and they are very eager to be of help. So thank you, Ms. Turner.

For Mr. Shafroth, you note in your testimony that the National Park Foundation hosted webinars to their partners on navigating the PPP loan process. Do you have a sense of how many representative park partners were able to obtain PPP loans?

Mr. SHAFROTH. Thank you, Senator Hirono.

I don't have a number, but I know many of them did. We actually, you know, we hosted a webinar and a national law firm, Arnold and Porter, offered to provide pro bono assistance to any of the friends' groups that wanted help in their navigation of that process. But why don't I plan to follow up with the Committee to give you some specific information about which organizations ultimately applied?

And Senator, I'll also say that we agree with you on the conservation corps issue. We're very actively involved in supporting the deployment of conservation corps throughout the National Park System. And so we too will work with you to find ways to ensure that the funds from Great American Outdoors Act and other places can be made available to the use of corps to execute those projects.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you. I think if we can all come together on supporting the kind of work by the corps then I think we can get it done.

So again, from you, Mr. Shafroth. With regard to the patchwork of various state and local mandates on public health and safety as it relates to the pandemic, I want to briefly touch on reopening. Have you heard any concerns from partners about their ability to ensure employee safety, such as requiring the use of masks as parks reopen, and do you feel that the protections put in place for the National Park Service for reopening are sufficient?

Mr. SHAFROTH. Thank you, Senator Hirono.

You know, one of the things that we're trying to do with our promotion of the Recreate Responsibly campaign is to ensure that all visitors have a strong understanding of the need to in a way to behave differently than we have before. I think Senator Heinrich was the one that said it earlier before you were on the phone, I think, that he described how people have really stepped in to a moment really to be more sensitive and aware of others. I don't know, my understanding, Senator, is that the Park Service decisions about social distancing and wearing a mask is something that is on a park-by-park basis. So it's difficult to say uniformly whether or not every park is, you know, doing things at a point where they could or should be. I do know that many of the local partner, friends' organizations are adhering to the local guidance from the governors and health offices.

So again, if we can collect some additional information, we're happy to get that for you.

Senator HIRONO. Don't you think that we should have, kind of, a standard set of requirements for a park reopening other than the patchwork that we are experiencing?

Mr. SHAFROTH. Well, that's certainly an option. One of the things that you may not know about us is we don't really get into the poli-

cies of the Park Service and telling them what to do and how to do it. We're there to support them to help them execute their goals and their projects and programs, but again, if there's something we can do to gather some more information for you to help you better understand what's going on, we're happy to do that.

Senator HIRONO. Again for Mr. Shafroth. Does the Foundation have any plans or strategies to use funds to help smooth out the differences of where some parks are experiencing 60 percent drop and then there are others—it is a whole range of changes that have happened. So do you have any plans to use funds to help smooth out the differences between parks across the country?

Mr. SHAFROTH. Senator, thank you for the question.

We discussed that a little bit with Senator Heinrich earlier, but yes, I think one of the big challenges we have right now is in dispersing visitation both within parks that have high visitation as well as across the National Park System. We have 419 national park units, more than half of that is at about 30% of our parks. And so, we must do better using, through the use of technology, I think. Imagine a Waze app that you could have in a, when you go into a park to understand the density of visitors in certain parts of the park versus other parts of the park. Would it help inform where you went and what time of day you went, et cetera?

Similarly, you know, we need to—we have something called our Lesser Known Parks program which helps visitors, potential visitors to parks, understand some of the lesser known places. Everybody knows about Yosemite and Yellowstone, Grand Teton, Denali and Acadia, et cetera, but very few people know at this point even about White Sands National Park and the literally hundreds of historical and cultural sites around the Park System. So we're very actively involved in drawing more attention to those places and hopefully drawing more visitors to them.

Senator HIRONO. Thank you very much. Thank you, and thanks to the Foundation for all that you do.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Hirono. I appreciate what you have just added there at the end, Mr. Shafroth. I think that is something that we all get focused on our favorite parks or the ones that, perhaps, are most well known, but we have some extraordinary treasures in other parts of the country—that a little bit of encouragement to go to the lesser known parks, I think, is good.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Wrangell-St. Elias is a good one for instance.

The CHAIRMAN. It is one of the best, isn't it? In fact, I would hope to get out there in August.

Let's go to Senator Hoeven from the great State of North Dakota.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, Madam Chairman, I appreciate it very much and speaking of, we all tend to focus on our favorite parks. I am going to do that right off the bat and start with Mr. Shafroth and bring up the Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota which is truly wonderful and beautiful. And you know, obviously with the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act now by the House and waiting for the President's signature, a very important part of that was the Restore Our Parks Act which I co-sponsored along with others and that provides a lot of funding for addressing deferred maintenance in our parks.

Can you talk to me a little bit about your thoughts on addressing deferred maintenance in the Theodore Roosevelt National Park, particularly the scenic loop in the South Unit? I would appreciate your thoughts and your comments.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Sure, thank you, Senator Hoeven, and thanks again for your support for the Great American Outdoors Act and Restore Our Parks.

Yeah, and I apologize, I have the numbers memorized for many parks, but I can't remember whether it's \$34 or \$43 million in deferred maintenance work that needs to be done at Teddy Roosevelt National Park, including filling the sinkhole in that road you described and as well as many other aspects, the visitor center, the maintenance shed, the Peaceful Valley. There's lots of work that continues, that needs to be done there. Those are all very important things. I don't think—we talked a bit about this earlier, about the process by which the Park Service and Congress will prioritize the projects that get done, but I think the challenge that exists in the park in North Dakota, Senator, as well as many others is how do we combine, you know, the private resources with the Great American Outdoors Act and maybe other federal resources to both address the deferred maintenance backlog as well as the modernization of these places.

And I think you understand, having been to the visitor center in Teddy Roosevelt National Park that it's fine if we repair the roof and fix the windows, things like that, and the HVAC, but we really want to have a different kind of experience, especially with the future development of the Theodore Roosevelt, President Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation. And so, we need to, kind of, try to lift up, I think, all of those assets at the same time.

Senator HOEVEN. Talk a little bit as well about your support for the library project.

Mr. SHAFROTH. Sure. The Foundation has been working very closely with the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library Foundation to try to work in tandem with them and the Park Service to create a more complete experience to the visitor who comes to Medora, to the park, to the area, to learn about the life and legacy of Theodore Roosevelt. And so, we're, you know, actually right now, they're in the process of identifying an architect to create, to look at ways in which we can create distributed experiences for visitors to that part of the, of your state. And you know, whether it be the Medora show or you know, the experiences that will happen in a building that the Library Foundation will have and as well as the many experiences that one could have in the Park, whether it be potentially mountain biking from the North Unit to the South Unit to having wilderness experiences and other kinds of recreational amenities. That's going to create, you know, that integrated, collaborative experience that I think we can create there is very exciting.

Senator HOEVEN. I would like to go to Mr. Lane, if I could, for just a minute.

In your opinion, on the public lands, what can Congress do to help our cattlemen? It is such a hard time out there for our ranchers and our cattlemen and, of course, they graze on the national grasslands. What, in your opinion, could we do in Congress to help

improve how we do that on our public lands and how we can help our ranchers, our cattlemen?

Mr. LANE. I think—I appreciate the question. I think first and foremost looking at that regulatory structure that cattlemen deal with now when they're working with federal grazing permits is the biggest area where Congress can help, making sure to communicate to the agencies what your expectation is of the implementation of the myriad laws that they have to navigate in order to implement those permits. I think there's a lot of fear in federal lands management as it relates to grazing at this point. I think because of the litigation that impacts almost every decision made by either the Forest Service or the BLM, more than I can list in a hearing like this. Rather than making the decision that's best for the resource, they make the decision that's most likely to avoid them spending the next ten years in court with activist litigants. So I think wherever you can look for opportunities to bolster their decision-making and give them a firm base within which to make the best decision for the resource, you're empowering them to make better decisions for our producers across the country.

Senator HOEVEN. Okay, my time is up here, but if you have other specific ideas that you think would help, I would really appreciate if you would forward them to my office.

Thanks so much, and thank you, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Hoeven.

Let's turn to Senator Cortez Masto.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Let me also echo Senator Hoeven's response and question to Mr. Lane. It is great to see you here. I support targeted grazing. I think you do need the flexibility to reduce fuel loads. Any other ideas you have, please send those to my office as well.

I appreciate you participating and every one else for being here as part of this important panel.

Mr. Kemper, I would like to start with you. In your written testimony you mentioned that there is a scarcity of water treatment officers and that this was a concern prior to the pandemic, but specifically your testimony references that because water is undervalued, we have a hard time recruiting people to work in the industry. So is there a strong role for the Federal Government to play in helping to facilitate that workforce development as it relates to water and water infrastructure?

Mr. KEMPER. Thank you for your question, Senator.

Yes, I do think there is, especially helping out with education and there's a role for training operators, water and wastewater operators. So I do think that in providing just cross training of water and wastewater operators would be really a benefit and that could come from the Federal Government and also, just assistance should we actually run short of operators to be able to provide help in that regard. Yes, it would be very beneficial.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Yes, the workforce—there is no doubt, it is a key and it is a constant we keep hearing over and over again.

Mr. Hepler, let me ask you this. In your testimony you state that social distancing requirements have complicated state and federal Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) management and control efforts across the country. If left unchecked, AIS will spread within a

water body and through recreational boating and other water sports activities and be inadvertently spread to other water bodies. Obviously we all have concerns about that. Can you further elaborate on the preventative measures that are being put in place by wildlife agencies at boat inspection points and your concerns there.

Mr. HEPLER. Thank you, Senator.

Yeah, this is, this actually hits home to South Dakota very well. We had zebra mussels show up in a top end of a drainage that borders with North Dakota/South Dakota and this drainage comes out to a lot of very important lakes for recreational use, home use and also one of our major hatcheries. And you know, when this, when COVID first hit, you know, we wanted to have teams out there checking boats, checking waters and because of our concern about getting social distancing, we just couldn't, we weren't in a place to be able to do that until we worked through and came to those safe measures.

And so, we look at that and we can do those on the ground, but also the cooperation between states, you know, with Senator Barasso and Wyoming and how we interact with how they do business and their lakes are a little bit different than ours. How we interact with Minnesota, these border states and that happens across the country, that communication is key. Every state is driven a little bit differently than other states by, you know, how the Governor, how they view the importance of invasive species or not. Governor Noem in the State of South Dakota last year sponsored some legislation to really raise the awareness. It brought into the cabinet discussion, just not us from Fish and Game, but also the Agriculture Department because that's really where the greatest concern is for a lot of these invasive species and get—in going through your dams.

So I think there's been a lot of work, but I mean, what's frustrating with this is that for the most part all can you do is slow the spread and I'd love to be able to say there's some magical way, a lot of ways we can stop these things, unfortunately there's not. And I don't know how kind our children are going to feel when they come to look at some of these things, but we're trying and we are trying to slow that spread, but it's a heck of a deal. And I certainly appreciate the work of those federal agencies getting some of that funding and there's some bills out there, talk some more about that. But you know, we're open to other ideas of communication, but you know, we have to make a difference. We have to at least give this a shot.

Senator, I hope that answered your question.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. It does, thank you.

And then, coming from Nevada we are seeing more wildfires, in general. I mean, just talking with all of you because I think as I am hearing more people are out recreating, maybe, for the first time, it is important that we have an education campaign for people to understand the responsibility as well.

Any other ideas that any of you have because I do have concerns about wildfires, rangeland fires, fires in our parks. We are seeing more of that, unfortunately caused by humans. And so, any other thoughts on what we need to know at a federal level that we have

not talked about already in this panel discussion which has been fantastic? So thank you, and I will just open it up to the panel.

Mr. LANE. Yeah, Senator, I think as the grazing community really sees a lot of this firsthand as they're working their ranches and they see those recreation enthusiasts come out onto their grazing allotments. I think education, not just about, kind of, how those resources are being used, but where they are is a critical part of that. Mixed surface management responsibility for those of us that work in these environments can still be very confusing. Am I on Forest Service land? Am I on BLM land? Am I on private land? And what are the changes I need to make in how I'm recreating based on which of those I might be on, or state land for that matter.

I think that there's far too little interpretation and information available out there for visitors to public lands that's easily accessible. If they can grab a map when they're heading out into the back country, if they can have some more information on gosh, when I'm crossing over a cattle guard I need to make sure that I leave a gate the way I found it because there's either some animals that need to be kept in or kept out of a certain area or there's a sensitive species that's being managed very carefully in this area or that. I think most of that is completely missed and it's not their fault, it's just not something they're aware of if they're not having to deal with it on a day in, day out basis. So I think that education component needs to be far more comprehensive and far more readily accessible to those users.

Mr. KEMPER. Senator, certainly doing everything we can. Colorado has a forest and water alliance, California has a similar group, that are really working to try to increase the pace and scale of work on resilient forests, things like the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, the Water Source Protection Program. But as it was referenced in earlier testimony, I think that I, you know, we've had 9,000, 9,000 boat decontaminations so far this year that is removing aquatic nuisance species from boats and that education is really important. Those are 9,000 opportunities.

The other problem that we have is that people are not necessarily knowing what's a public land and what's not and access to water infrastructure and there's a story in my testimony about the difficulties that when we have Ag infrastructure that is on public lands that people are leaving gates open, not knowing where they are supposed to be and not. So there's concern there.

Senator CORTEZ MASTO. Thank you. I know I have gone over my time. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cortez Masto.

I think we have had a good range of questions here this morning, and I appreciate the range from colleagues here and the responses from our panel. I just have a couple more here before we wrap up.

I mentioned I really had a great two weeks when I was back home, but don't let me digress, then I will start showing you my pictures. But one of the things that I saw when I was in Denali National Park, as folks are aware, you have one very long, very narrow and very scenic road deep into the park and during the season you are able to gain access by way of a bus and it is not a fancy bus, it is a bus. As a result of the limitations in the park and the social distancing requirements, we have seen fewer people in those

buses, fewer buses, but I commend the leadership there at Denali in recognizing that they needed to figure out a little bit of flexibility if we are going to get people into the park. How do we do this and do it safely?

I ran into two commercial operators who have temporary commercial use authorizations and they guide very small groups—when I say small, two cars. So this is a pretty limited situation. One was actually guided by a fellow who was driving a Tesla which is a feat in itself over those gravel roads. Nice car, but that is the first electric car to be piloting into the park. The other group was one pilot car, a Jeep and two other Jeeps again. So very limited, very small, but it gives a level of flexibility and it gives some opportunities with temporary permits. I was pleased to see that in Denali.

Does anybody have any suggestions as to ways that either through Interior or Forest Service we can provide greater flexibility to those who do have permits in recognizing that we are all looking to accommodate in different ways and it might look different in other areas? Maybe, Ms. Turner, you have some examples that you have heard of? I am curious to know if anyone has any suggestions with regards to that?

Ms. Turner.

Ms. TURNER. Thank you for that, and I've actually been on that Denali helicopter ride and landed on a glacier so I know exactly what that experience is like and it's really unfortunate that less people are having that experience.

You know, I think the fee waivers right now are so top of mind because they're so necessary to just keep these folks in business. But beyond that, contract extensions and permit extensions are incredibly important. The agencies aren't going to be processing new permits, so it's really important that businesses have some certainty that maybe they'll have a year or two more on their contract to figure something out, like you saw in Denali. And then, I think, the SOAR Act has a lot of flexibilities in it that would provide help and support for guides and outfitters, concessionaires, permittees for a while beyond this pandemic.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks, I appreciate that.

We have talked about the increase in visitation whether it is on our national parks or our state parks or our public lands, and I think that that is good as families have gotten outdoors and obviously the effort that the President will hopefully soon sign into law, the Great American Outdoors Act, again is going to encourage that we are doing more to just better take care of our parks and our public areas.

Any suggestions to us on what Congress and our federal land managers can do to ensure that we sustain this momentum by local tourism that we have seen this summer? Again, I mention things slow down in Alaska in the winter time. It is different, again, in places that host ski areas, but I think we recognize the value that these tourist dollars bring to many of our communities. Not only the value, but just the enhancement to our lives when we are able to get out and recreate like this. We don't want to have another pandemic situation next summer. We don't want that to be the thing that keeps us continuing to visit our public lands. Any sug-

gestions in terms of how we continue with the efforts that will bring increased visitorship?

Mr. SHAFROTH. Madam Chairman, a thought that I have is, you know, we are engaged in a pretty active campaign right now to welcome people back to the parks. We have two different, sort of, ads out there, alright—one called “Wonder Calls,” another one related to the appreciation of our Park Service employees and the hard work they do. And I think those messages kind of continue to remind people that these places are amazing. They’re part of our legacy, our history. I’ll also say combined with some messages around how to recreate responsibly so—people are, you know, fearful at some level and we need to let them know that there’s a way that we can do this that’s safe to allow you to get back in the park and do what you want to do. So I kind of feel like there’s dual messages we need to continue to push out there to remind people how great they are and just to make sure they understand that it’s a little bit of a different game.

Ms. TURNER. And I would just add the health connection. I think we’re seeing the outdoors as really a solution, possibly, or helpful in the pandemic. People need Vitamin D. They need exercise. They need to be experiencing the outdoors. I think connecting parks and our public lands really to health, keeping people healthy and communities healthy is maybe a new message. We’ve known this all along, but the American public seems to have really taken that to heart lately. And if we could continue to connect that, I think we can create lifestyles where people weave outdoor activity and these parks and public lands into their daily habits.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Lane.

Mr. LANE. I think we also need to make sure that we’re paying attention to the health of the resource as we see these balances change of people using these landscapes, particularly where we see municipalities meeting some of these managed federal environments. Some of the prescribed burns that otherwise would have helped keep those resources healthy have been canceled or delayed due to COVID-19, looking for some opportunities to use tools like grazing as a substitute to ensure that where we couldn’t get our first choice done to manage some of those fuel loads, that we can put some other tools in place to ensure that the work still gets done and that we still have those active management regimes in place is important as we move through this, sort of, fluid time in managing these lands.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Hepler.

Mr. HEPLER. Madam Chair, I’d also add that, you know, besides the health piece which we absolutely agree with, we’re going to work that at a national level, is that this is an opportunity to get people in the past where we maybe haven’t been in the indoor parks whether they’re federal or state. And so, whether they’re—so we want people of color to be able to come in these parks and do it safely. There’s a whole diversity there and if we want to remain relevant as state agencies and as federal agencies, you know, we need to make sure the whole broad spectrum that represents this great country of ours, is welcoming to our public areas. And there’s a certain amount of responsibility that comes with that.

I think this is one golden opportunity. One good thing that can come out of this COVID-19 crisis we're in is bringing those people into the fold and let them now it's good to get outside and whether that's outside in the city park in a big city, you know, or coming to one of our wonderful state parks. By the way, we're open for business in South Dakota. We'd love to have you come visit. Come to South Dakota. But either way, it's the same message. We want to be able to do it safely, feel comfortable and enjoy themselves.

The CHAIRMAN. Right.

Mr. Kemper, do you want to add a final word there?

Mr. KEMPER. The other thing that is not quite relevant to that but the concern out there about the loss of revenue from severance tax is really having a huge impact and there's a lot of collaborative efforts that go on that some of that money gets directed toward both for aging infrastructure for water and it's something I think would be helpful for the Committee to keep monitoring on as that loss of production and the severance tax impacts because it does impact the investments in the forest landscape resiliency program.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I appreciate you adding that. I think we had a good discussion about some of the impact of the deferred maintenance issues on our public lands, and we recognize that.

A couple of you have mentioned the need to make sure that we are being responsible out there, and I had mentioned that several of the experiences that I had were very positive where people are accepting certain protocols as they are out enjoying our parks. I am also hearing that as we are encouraging more of the local people around our parks to use our parks during this time of COVID, for oftentimes what happens is those that are closest to the parks are so busy serving the people who are coming from other areas that they don't even get into these very special places.

At a time like this where perhaps your small business is not operating or it is at greatly reduced volumes, you actually have time to go out and experience it yourself. I have heard in my state some Alaskans saying, "I love this area, but I felt like I was not welcomed in my park." That is hard to hear, and that is not the message that we want, whether it is from our parks or from our Forest Service or from those who are managing our public lands. These are America's areas. These are all of our ours. This is not something special just built for Park Service employees or for Forest Service employees to enjoy the benefit.

I think it is important that we respect the fact that we welcome all Americans to our parks and whether it is the locals or whether it is families who have never had that opportunity. We mentioned people of color and doing more to make them feel welcome in our parks. This is a job and a responsibility that we all have.

So we will be working toward that, but thank you for your input this morning. I think it has been very helpful, and as we move forward with this next round of COVID relief, know that many on this Committee are looking out for those who have been impacted in ways and perhaps not seen that level of support that will be necessary to carry them through.

With that, I thank you again and the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:11 p.m. the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX MATERIAL SUBMITTED

**U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
July 23, 2020 Hearing: *The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic
on Users of Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks*
Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Will Shafroth**

Questions from Senator Martha McSally

Question 1: Mr. Shafroth, last year, Arizona's national parks were visited by 12.5 million people who spent \$1.3 billion in park gateway communities, supporting 19,000 jobs. Grand Canyon National Park alone supported 11,800 of those jobs. This year, however, we are relooking at vastly different picture.

What effect has COVID-19 had on visitation and related economic activity at Grand Canyon NP?

The National Park Foundation is the official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service. The following information provided is from publicly available statistics from the National Park Service. As the official nonprofit partner, we work in close coordination with NPS, but do not speak for the agency on matters of policy.

The National Park Service provides monthly reports on visitation statistics and trends in national parks around the country. For the month of June 2020, NPS [reported](#) a 64.89% reduction in total recreation visits from the same month the year prior, a 100% reduction in total non-recreation visits, and 65.01% reduction in total visits. Total visitation, year to date, is down 61.45%. The report also has information about total nights for concessioner lodging and concessioner campgrounds. Although detailed economic data is not available in the monthly reports, a [recent study](#) released by Northern Arizona University illustrated the economic impact of COVID-19 on gateway communities to the Grand Canyon, including Williams. The study found that 38% of businesses were open, and 62% have either furloughed or laid off employees, with an additional 39% applying for aid.

How are guides and outfitters, as well as other park partners in our state managing these impacts?

As the official nonprofit park partner of the National Park Service, our mission is to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." While we often work closely with guides and outfitters, we do not speak for them. The National Park Foundation respectfully defers questions regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, or other general matters, to specific guides and outfitters, or trade associations that are more representative of those partners (American Outfitter and Guide Association, for example).

Question 2: According to the Grand Canyon River Outfitter Association, park closures and capacity restrictions led to the loss of hundreds of Colorado River trips, thousands of customer reservations and millions of dollars in revenue this season.

We know that the health and safety of the public and the outfitters themselves must be prioritized, but are there additional actions the National Park Service, or Congress, can take to help salvage the rest of the season or provide additional relief to these businesses?

While ensuring that the health and safety of the public and all who do business with the National Park Service remain at the forefront, more can be done to sustain these community engines for the long-term. First, ensuring

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
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Questions for the Record Submitted to Mr. Will Shafroth

that park partners and small businesses continue to maintain access to PPP loans, and particularly to loan forgiveness, if necessary, is vital. The National Park Foundation would defer to individual businesses, including guides and outfitters, as well as the National Park Service, for additional direction they are seeking from Congress in terms of relief due to the pandemic.

U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
 July 23, 2020 Hearing: *The Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic
 on Users of Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks*
 Questions for the Record Submitted to Ms. Jess Turner

Questions from Senator Martha McSally

Questions: The uneven impact of the pandemic is exemplified at Arizona's Lake Mead and Lake Powell where concessionaires report that business is down 75 percent and 25 percent respectively at the two locations. But even at these locations, there are huge differences. Houseboat rentals are way up while sightseeing cruises and hotel reservations are way down.

Ms. Turner, what are outdoor recreation outfitters like those at national recreation areas doing to adapt to the changing tastes and consumer demands during COVID?

Answer: Rentals of houseboats, RVs and campsites have seen dramatic increases while hotels and restaurants, are either scaled back for health code compliance, closed for lack of staff because of health code restrictions on employee lodging, or impacted by the drop in international visitors. As with many other businesses across the country, outfitters and concessionaires are enacting contactless operations whenever possible, following social distancing protocols and requiring masks when indoors, and implementing enhanced cleaning procedures of equipment and surfaces between guest usage. Given evolving situations, they are also recommending calling ahead to confirm availability of rentals.

What can federal land management agencies do to be more helpful and responsive partners to local concessionaires during the pandemic?

Answer: Federal land management agencies can provide uniform guidance across land and water management systems so that guides, outfitters, concessionaires and users are able to predict and adapt to new restrictions at areas regardless of managing agency. Additionally, Secretaries, particularly Agriculture and Interior, should be given flexibility in their administration and extension of contracts, permits, and other authorizations (such as waiving of fees) for the provision of public recreational facilities and/or services on public lands and waters. This will allow businesses that operate on public lands and waters to recoup losses incurred by the pandemic without having to go through the costly and time-consuming process of resubmitting permits or contract proposals. Agencies can also work to be in constant contact with concessionaires as pandemic levels and methods to combat them shift over time.



July 23, 2020

Chairman Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Joe Manchin, III
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Manchin,

On behalf of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC or Conservancy), our members and volunteers, we would like to share our perspective on the topic of today's hearing to "Examine the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Users of Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks." The events of the past several months have been unprecedented in our lifetimes as well as in the lifetime of the National Park System unit that ATC is responsible for managing under the administrative auspices of the National Park Service. Our multi-jurisdictional nature and presence throughout many communities within the eastern United States has provided us a vantage point and allowed us to draw lessons that we believe should benefit the Committee as it considers how to not only prepare for future emergencies, but as it continues to respond to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (, the Trail, ANST or A.T.) is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world, measuring roughly 2,193 miles in length. The Trail travels through 88 counties in 14 states along the crests and valleys of the Appalachian Mountain Range, from its southern terminus at Springer Mountain, Georgia, to the northern terminus at Katahdin, Maine. This region of the U.S. is rich in scenic, cultural, and historic resources, and offers habitat for numerous unique species. Spanning 11° of latitude and over 6,500 ft of elevation, the Trail serves as an emerald necklace tying together species, habitats, and critical resources as well as communities and public land units. The Trail traverses six other units of the National Park System, eight National Forests, three National Wildlife Refuges, and 74 parcels of state forest, park, and game land, placing the ATC at the center of a complex network of non-profit organizations, governmental agencies (both federal and state), and almost 6,000 volunteers.

ATC is the legislatively identified manager of the ANST, operating under a Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service. The Conservancy was founded in 1925 as a convening space and to facilitate the building of the Trail by independent Trail Building Clubs. When the termini were connected in 1937, our role shifted from organizing construction to providing central leadership and coordination between the various state and federal governments as well as the now 31 independent A.T. Maintaining Clubs. Given the length and scope of the ANST and the comparatively small staffs of the unit

staff at the National Park Service (9.5 FTE) and ATC (45 individuals), many staffers in both shops act as ombudsmen of sorts, responsible for a variety of related, but not necessarily connected, programs. This limited capacity is additionally strained by rising compliance demands as increasing energy, telecommunications, and transportation-related Trail crossings have been proposed. Brazen encroachments across the protected boundaries of the A.T. regularly occur, and challenges in providing appropriate visitor use guidance is growing as more inexperienced hikers head out to the Trail. On March 13, 2020, we found ourselves unprepared to respond to a global pandemic that somehow seemed to have arrived out of nowhere.

On March 18, 2020, ATC dispatched a letter (included with this submission) to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the U.S. House and Senate Committees on Appropriations requesting that as those committees consider relief legislation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically requesting that the small businesses of the trailside Appalachian towns not be forgotten and that the deferred maintenance needs of federal public lands be considered as recovery legislation is formulated. Both the chairman and ranking member of this committee received that letter, as did the Members of the House and Senate who represent the ANST. We reiterate today our commitment to those gateway communities and request that special attention be given to not just the mom-and-pop, small-scale businesses that provide essential services for Trail users, but for year-round inhabitants of our trailside towns. In addition, we ask that the governments of those municipalities, counties, and the states, receive the support they need to make up for lost outdoor recreation revenue and to provide critical support for essential services. Outdoor recreation is economic development, and as the 2020 summer season is a lost one by necessity, for many establishments, making sure they are operational in 2021 will take federal support.

Gateway Community Support

Along the Appalachian Trail landscape, our 14 states support \$2,644,000 in direct jobs, \$259.2 billion in consumer spending, \$79.8 billion in salaries and wages, and \$17.2 billion in state and local tax revenue. For perspective, the Bureau of Economic Analysis released a report last year that states outdoor recreation accounts for 2.2 percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, supports 5.2 million American jobs, and contributes, nationally, \$778 billion in economic output. Our communities are linked to a national network of outdoor recreation venues by the A.T. Many of these communities are in the early stages of building small businesses focused on serving the outdoor recreation community. Small Trail-related businesses will not survive the impact of travel restrictions and attempts to limit the spread of COVID-19—measures that were necessary to protect public health in counties already recognized as distressed under the U.S. Code.

40 U.S.C., Subtitle V states that “*distressed*” counties are those that “have high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration” and “are the most severely and persistently economic distressed and underdeveloped.” Counties that are “transitional” counties “have recently suffered high rates of poverty, unemployment, or outmigration” or “are economically distressed and underdeveloped.” At-risk counties are those at risk of

becoming economically distressed, ranking between the worst 10 percent and 25 percent of the nation's counties. **68 percent of Appalachian Trail counties are considered distressed, at-risk, or transitional.**

In 2005, ATC launched a new program: the Appalachian Trail Community™ program to enhance community partnerships because we recognized that without education, increased monitoring of natural resources, and engagement of trailside communities, the natural, cultural, and scenic resources that prompted the Congress to establish the ANST as the nation's first National Scenic Trail in 1968 would be at risk. Today, 48 designated A.T. Communities™ participate as partners in the program, ensuring local residents, including young people, have connections and opportunities related to nearby outdoor assets, fostering community pride, good stewardship, and local economic benefits.

Gateway communities, or those located beside public land units, serve as the front door to public lands and waters, hosting both those engaged in recreation as well as the workforce (and volunteer-force) that is critical to safe and responsible enjoyment and maintenance. Because of the remote nature of many public lands, visitor lodging and employee housing are often in short supply and are therefore cost-prohibitive, which limits the constituencies that are able to visit and fill critical management and visitor gaps. Our businesses across the region need quick action by the federal government to ameliorate the gap in funding and accessibility of the CARES Act programs. Moreover, we need immediate, direct assistance to support small businesses. **Our partners at Small Business Majority are asking Congress to allocate \$600 billion in direct grants to small businesses to cover payroll and operational expenses, in addition to any new funds provided to emergency loan assistance programs.**

In cities and towns across the country, fostering entrepreneurship has become a key component to most economic development strategies. And while different types of entrepreneurs have different needs, there is a common framework of conditions and support that are particularly conducive to a thriving entrepreneurial culture. Taken together, these conditions and support are frequently referred to as Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. When aligned, these elements provide the necessary financial, social, and human capital to foster inclusive, local entrepreneurship in innovative and creative ways. In this way, the ecosystem model mobilizes the entire community to support local business start-ups, business growth or expansion, and transitioning businesses. From a drop-in space to marketing and from business law to financing, the idea is to surround the start-up with key elements for success.

In addition, we echo Small Business Majority's request that Congress:

- Ensure \$100 million in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds are set aside for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), Minority Depository Institutions (MDIs), USDA rural development programs, and other programs that aid businesses in underserved communities.
- Provide forbearance on all small business loans, including credit card payments, for at least six months.
- Adjust repayment due dates on property taxes and commercial rent to give needed flexibility.

We have included the full policy proposal from Small Business Majority with this submission to the record. The other major recovery legislation we believe will benefit our trailside towns as well as the public land units themselves is H.R. 1957, the Great American Outdoors Act, which will address approximately one-half of the nation's total current estimated deferred maintenance backlog. The Restoration Fund established by that Act will make available \$6 billion for the NPS, \$1.4 billion for the USFS, and \$475 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, among other beneficiaries. ATC is grateful to the chairman and ranking member, as well as all other Members who have supported this legislation by a margin of 73-25 in the Senate, and, as of yesterday, by 310-107 in the House.

Lack of Intergovernmental Coordination

ATC's first and foremost responsibility is to ensure the proper management and maintenance of the A.T. and access to some of the most significant recreation lands in the eastern United States. This is possible only through a Cooperative Management System (CMS) involving legal and handshake agreements between the 31 Maintaining Clubs (representing nearly 6,000 volunteers), and federal and state land management agencies. The National Park Service (NPS) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) are our primary federal partners, with 40% of the A.T. passing through eight national forests and 40% located on NPS land (most of which is land held in trust by the United States for the ANST, as authorized by the National Trails System Act of 1968). Throughout the Mid-Atlantic and New England Regions, large sections of the Trail (about 18%) are located on state-conserved lands. The remaining 2% of the Trail is located on lands managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and private landowners.

While the complexity of the CMS is something that is genuinely difficult to appreciate from the outside, it is fundamental to both the existence of the resource and how ATC and the other "cooperators" respond to everything from executing volunteer service agreements (VSAs) to responding to a pandemic of global proportions. In the CMS, it has been possible, however challenging, to act with a high degree of uniformity. "Consensus" is often the watchword for cooperative management, as non-profits, government agencies, and individual members of the public work together to ensure that the Trail, which is more than a treadway, is afforded the proper respect and support. Most of the time, the differences in management styles and prerogatives across the various land-holding agencies does not produce anything that a fair amount of discussion cannot cure. From its origin, the A.T. has been a ground-up enterprise, built by the labor of volunteers and visionaries. Volunteerism has not, however, ever been sufficient to protect the resource or the values for which it was conserved. Without the support and encouragement of the federal and state governments, there would be no Appalachian National Scenic Trail today.

Despite the federal government being aware of the increased proliferation of the COVID-19 virus prior to the March 13, 2020 national emergency declaration, the response from Washington was delayed, haphazard, and ad hoc. The value of centralized authority that both a federal government and a federally protected Trail were intended to

provide was absent. The decision by this Administration to push most of the responsibility for responding to the pandemic to the local level prevented us from having a single response to a national problem for our National Scenic Trail. Instead—for our single National Scenic Trail—we had a response from each of our seven connected National Park System units, our eight National Forest System units, and our 14 states.

ATC is comfortable as a convener, intermediary, and guide. Our experience is in trail management, land protection, volunteer services, and, when needed, navigating community gatherings and governmental bureaucracies. The experience that we do not keep in house—nor have we ever previously been expected to—relates to public health. Our most informing historical perspective is from responding to Norovirus, which has not been on the scale of COVID-19, and has not struck everywhere all at once (albeit at varying levels of intensity). As the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture publicly declared that they were pushing the decisions on unit response to the leadership of the national park units (superintendents) and national forest district (district rangers), their Washington offices retained final say.

To us on the ground, shuttling between local Maintaining Clubs, federal agencies, and state governments, there seemed to be a belief in Washington that states were far away from each other, and it was not possible to cross state borders with any degree of alacrity. For ATC, headquartered in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, from which it is easy to cross between West Virginia, Maryland, and Virginia, that thinking belied our everyday experience, as well as the everyday experience of millions of Americans. By devolving governmental response, we didn't have a single, national standard that could be understood and followed. We had standards for at least each state, which informed—but did not determine—the standards for the federal public land units within those states. Within states, particularly those by the southern terminus of the Trail (where visitation was very high in March), standards differed county-by-county. By ATC headquarters, we had five standards within four miles, between our three federal units, three states and one state park. As the states, starved for information that should have been provided by the federal government, struggled to set standards and provide guidance to preserve health and safety, the public land units had to wait for those state—and sometimes county—governments to make decisions, and the confusion present across the country manifested for us in ways that could have been absolutely anticipated.

Fulfilling our obligation under our Cooperative Agreement with the NPS, ATC provided a central clearinghouse for information regarding public land and associated amenity accessibility (i.e. open or closed, what the safety requirements are). It became increasingly clear to our user-facing staff that many states (and counties) were struggling to get the word out as to how potential users could safely recreate. Our guidance page refreshed daily and we often found our summaries reproduced verbatim by local units, partner organizations, and other cooperators. The struggle was nowhere more apparent than for those units that bordered each other. The distance between Abram S. Hewitt State Forest in New Jersey and Cascade Lake Park in New York, not to mention the ANST lands that connect them is feet, not miles. There was no shortage of users who accidentally crossed from one jurisdiction into another and violated the public health

guidance of one or the other, nor was there any shortage of users who intentionally left their home jurisdiction in order to circumvent restrictions they didn't believe should apply to them. By passing the buck to state governments to set their own guidance (often without the information that had been available to the federal government), the federal government ignored the ubiquity of the automobile and of the inherent American ideal, that where there is a will, there is a way. The way, however, is not always safe.

ATC supported the decision by APPA to issue a stand-down order for the ANST's volunteers during the early days of the crisis. After months of utilizing the CMS in order to protect staff, volunteers, and visitors as best as APPA, ATC, and USFS were able, it was late May before there was a sufficient understanding of how to safely provide for volunteers on the Trail, as well as to cater to the visitors who never stopped coming. The guidance document, intended to be universal for all A.T. volunteers, is the successful product of the CMS operating with the information it needs as it was developed by APPA, facilitated by ATC, and informed by volunteers. The informational packet developed by the ANST Adaptive Recovery Task Force and distributed to volunteers is included with this letter for the Committee's edification.

While we have achieved an equilibrium, and there now exists, we hope, a sufficient understanding of the threat presented by the COVID-19 virus for the majority of the Trail's users, as well as coordination between all cooperators. In the event of a future surge, or sustained presence of the virus, we feel confident that we will be able to respond appropriately. ATC is proud of the incredible dedication of employees throughout our cooperating units, and thankful for the doggedness with which the National Park Service employees staffing the ANST office uphold their charge. We are disappointed, however, at the lack of coordination between the USFS and NPS occurring in Washington, as well as the lack of support—in information and scientifically based guidance—the federal government provided the states. We are also frustrated by the absence of a uniform NPS standard on levying and lifting stand down orders for volunteers across NPS units that rely on volunteers for maintenance work (i.e. National Scenic Trails).

The Need for More Outdoor Recreation Venues

Starting almost immediately after the emergency declaration of March 13, visitation to the A.T. skyrocketed. What we had previously come to expect on holiday weekends, we began to see weekday after weekday from Mount Springer, Georgia to Harriman State Park in New York. That much of New England was still under heavy snow was the driving factor for those public lands to see only slight upticks in usage early on. Weekends, in particular, became times of high concern for A.T. managers and volunteers as we observed cars at trailhead parking lots with license plates from jurisdictions suggesting that those users were not stopping by on their way somewhere convenient. The Trail had become, for them, at that time, an exotic attraction.

Previously obscure trailheads have seen visitation that rivals the levels generally experienced at some of the most iconic of the A.T.'s vistas. Given their proximity to population centers, locations like White Rocks, Pennsylvania and Snickers Gap, Virginia

have seen peak season usage more likely to be experienced at more popular sites like Blood Mountain, Georgia or Mount Washington, New Hampshire. Given the extremely limited capability of APPA's law enforcement officers (LEOs) to coordinate with state and local law enforcement—there are only two FTE LEOs for the entire 2,193-mile Trail—trailhead parking lots often overflowed onto state and county roads, creating hazards for motorists and recreators.

Americans flocked to outdoor recreation venues where they believed they would encounter a lower density of people. Many of these visitors came to discover what ATC and proponents of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) have long known: there are not enough accessible outdoor recreation venues capable of meeting current demand for public lands.

The A.T. was built on the back of LWCF. From the federal-side acquisitions that fueled the protection of the Trail on APPA and state lands throughout much of the Mid-Atlantic and New England to the enhancements made to the national forests throughout much of the south, the A.T. as we know it would not exist today were it not for LWCF and the commitment of generations of cooperators to the natural, scenic, and cultural values that garnered the Trail's protection in 1968. LWCF continues to make the A.T. Experience possible, providing for a variety of improvements, such as Trail section relocations, viewshed preservation, and parking lot enhancements. While there is no world in which ATC would not tout the Trail as a destination as well as a location, the instant pandemic has crystallized for ATC that particularly when contagion is a threat, the safest place to recreate is locally.

ATC's guidance to Trail users evolved over the early weeks of the COVID-19 crisis, and our current guidance, to recreate locally, has exposed a truth that ATC believes should be as widely understood as possible: there are not enough outdoor recreation venues within and beside large, population-dense metropolitan communities, nor are there sufficient means for individuals to use public transportation (when it is safe to do so) in order to visit farther afield venues for outdoor recreation. We believe that some of the strain posed by the unseasonal and unexpected visitation to the the A.T. could have been alleviated if there were parks, forests, and other outdoor spaces where physical distancing is possible within walking distance in the more population-dense portions of the United States. For this reason and more, ATC supports federal and state efforts to enhance the ANST closer to population centers, as well as to acquire and develop lands for outdoor recreation within and closer to metropolitan areas. Furthermore, municipal and county governments (as well as applicable regional authorities) must make provision—with federal assistance if necessary—to provide means by public transportation for individuals to access public lands. Accordingly, ATC supports legislation such as S. 1458 (the Outdoors For All Act) and S. 2467 (the Transit to Trails Act).

As of this hearing, the U.S. Senate passed by a 73-25 margin H.R. 1957, the Great American Outdoors Act, which, on the heels of last year's passage of the Dingell Act, will establish a permanent and fully funded stream of funding to conserve land and provide for outdoor recreation. The U.S. House approved that same legislation by 310-

107 and the entire A.T. Ecosystem eagerly awaits the President's signature of this legislation. By effectively doubling the funding that has ever been available to the federal government and states since the enactment of the LWCF, the federal government is recognizing the right that all people have to clean air, clean water, the opportunity to experience the natural world, and the availability of safe and accessible venues for outdoor recreation. Again, because we cannot say it enough, we are grateful for the support of so many Members of Congress, including the chairman and ranking member of this committee.

Outdoor recreation is rural economic development. The enactment of the Great American Outdoors Act will improve access to and protection of public lands over time, as well as provide a nearly \$10 billion stimulus project for our gateway communities over the next five years (and beyond, for LWCF), but these are not enough. Providing for the proper care and stewardship of our conserved lands and resources is essential to securing the long-term viability of the communities along National Trails and throughout the United States. Responding to the ongoing pandemic and resulting economic crisis will require the federal, state, and local governments to think outside of the box and pull as many levers as possible. One of those levers on the federal side is to provide additional support to state and local governments, as well as the independent businesses that are vital to our trailside economies. Get Americans working again and reviving our dynamic gateway communities must occur safely and thoughtfully.

We stand committed to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail and continue to recruit and advise others as necessary.

If you have any questions, please contact me at bmysliwicz@appalachiantrail.org or 207-370-0450. Thank you.

Signed,



Brendan Mysliwicz
Director of Federal Policy and Legislation
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

CC: U.S. Senate ANST Delegation
Members, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Appalachian National Scenic Trail
Post Office Box 50
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia 25425



IN REPLY REFER TO:

June 17, 2020

Dear Volunteer Partners:

As our nation continues to confront an unprecedented public health challenge, the safety and health of our visitors, employees, volunteers, and partners remains paramount. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is taking the risks presented by COVID-19 seriously and is following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and monitoring federal, state, and local actions to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. Social distancing measures, closures, and the suspension or cancellation of some programs have been necessary to safeguard the health and welfare of visitors, employees, volunteers, partners, our families, and local communities. Our priority is to slow the spread of the virus.

In response to this very dynamic and serious situation, the Appalachian Trail (AT) cooperative management partners came together to form an AT Adaptive Recovery Task Force.

I want to thank the members of the Task Force for their tireless efforts to chart a path forward to help ensure the health and safety of all partners based upon the best scientific data currently available, all the while within an ever-changing landscape. Their work highlights the strength of the AT Cooperative Management System, coming together as one, in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation.

AT Volunteers

Dan Howe, ATC Board and Stewardship Council
Trudy Phillips, NBATC, Stewardship Council
Bill Bryant, GATC, Stewardship Council
Jim Fetig, PATC
Heather Clish, AMC, Stewardship Council
David Grimes, ODATC, Stewardship Council
Scott Deitchman, GATC, CDC and US Public Health Office Retiree

AT Community

Abigail Norton, Mayor of Hot Springs, NC

USFS

Shawn Thomas (Region 8)
Holly Knox (Region 9)

APPA

Wendy Janssen
Kurt Speers
Keith Stegall
Jim Von Haden

ATC

Sandi Marra
 Laura Belleville
 Shalin Desai
 Leanna Joyner
 Hawk Metheny
 Andrew Downs
 Morgan Sommerville
 Michelle Miller

The result of the Task Force's hard work is the AT Adaptive Recovery Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). The protocols in the SOP will be updated periodically when new information about COVID-19 becomes available.

The attached resources are intended to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19 while volunteers re-engage with trail management and fieldwork activities once these conditions are met:

- Local, state, and land management authorities have re-opened the trail in the area;
- Volunteers are clear of symptoms;
- Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment exists and is available for respective tasks.

Phased Opening Protocols are defined in the SOP, but in all Phases:

- Establish and continue communication with local and state authorities to determine current infection levels and mitigation strategies in your community.
- Protect and support volunteers who are at higher risk for severe illness by advising everyone about the risks associated with COVID-19 during trail and field work.
- All volunteers should routinely assess risks and adapt work to evolving conditions by using tools that help to assess risk (see Risk Calculator App and CDC Self-Screening Tool), and develop operational leadership through the *Trail Safe!* Training.

The procedures outlined in the SOP are based on evidence that the virus can be contracted through close association with an infected person or by contact with a contaminated surface. The virus can also be transmitted to others even when no symptoms are exhibited by an infected person. The AT Adaptive Recovery Task Force is providing this guidance for volunteers to limit the spread of and exposure to COVID-19 in a consistent manner. Clubs may offer members additional guidance to minimize risks and are empowered to make decisions based upon these protocols.

Volunteer activities are optional, and participation is at the discretion of the volunteer. Declining to work will not affect a volunteer's current status. Volunteers who fall into a high risk category are advised to carefully assess travel and work outside their homes, and avoid all activities that could increase exposure to COVID-19. First and foremost, we want you to be safe.

Attached please find the draft adaptive recovery SOP (and accompanying visual aid), one Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) to mitigate hazards while working in the field, a risk continuum, and a decision framework.

Given the current situation, precautionary steps are essential to ensure the safety of all. Decisions are based upon comprehensive and continual risk assessments. This includes following public health recommendations concerning social distancing, as well as having proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and adequate sanitation supplies to reduce COVID-19 exposure to employees, volunteers, and the public.

To support the clubs in the purchase of necessary COVID-19 supplies, I have set aside APPA-NPS funds to supplement the purchase of PPE items that have been identified that volunteers will be required to use when performing their work. APPA Facility Manager Keith Stegall has developed a PPE Request form for clubs to request these required items. Items will be purchased by APPA staff and directly shipped from vendors to the designated club representative. The NPS-APPA staff can also purchase signs for use on APPA lands – a general COVID-19 Safety Alert and Guidance Sign and Privy/Shelter Closure Sign. Sign requests can be made via the same form. Clubs can also produce their own copies of the signs if they so choose. The deadline for PPE and Sign requests is COB Monday, July 6.

We greatly value and appreciate your dedication, support, and patience as we continue our collaborative work of preserving and protecting the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

We will welcome volunteers back to service in the phases outlined in the SOP beginning Friday, June 19. Given the scope and scale of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail across fourteen states, club determinations will need to be based upon local conditions, personal protective equipment requirements, meeting Phase 1, 2, or 3 criteria, and all volunteers reading, acknowledging, and complying with the COVID-19 JHA. In order to resume work, all AT volunteers will need to complete an online acknowledgement. The website for all resources (including the PPE and Sign Request Form) and the acknowledgement can be accessed at appalachiantrail.org/volunteeracknowledgement or appalachiantrail.org/volunteer/COVIDsafety.

As you return to the field, we ask that you report your observations to the respective regional ATC staff so that we are aware of current conditions and can address any issues together.

Thank you for your continued flexibility as continuous assessments are made as the situation unfolds and we continue to navigate this "new normal" together. If areas see a resurgence, there may be the need to limit volunteering again to provide for the health and safety of all.

As I stated in my May 4 message, fulfilling our shared mission during the pandemic entails challenges, but also opportunities to help us envision new ways of preserving and protecting irreplaceable cultural and natural resources, maintaining the trail, educating the public, nurturing a lifelong connection to the outdoors and welcoming all to the AT.

If you have any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With gratitude,



Wendy K. Janssen
Superintendent

Appalachian National Scenic Trail	1. WORK PROJECT/ACTIVITY Working During COVID-19 Pandemic	2. LOCATION Trail Wide	Includes work performed on lands of National Park Service, and various state park and lands
JOB HAZARD ANALYSIS (JHA) References-FSH 6709.11 and -12 OSHA (Instructions on Reverse)	3. NAME(S) OF ANALYST(S) Keith Stegall	4. Work Supervisor Various	5. DATE PREPARED
Required Standards and General Note:	OSHA General Duty Clause 29 U.S.C. § 654, 5(a)(1); OSHA General Industry Standards 29 CFR 1910; RM - 83A Public Health; RM-50B; Occupational Safety & Health Program; DM Part 485; CDC/Public Health/ NPS/USDOT guidelines, NPS guidelines on the use of cloth face coverings; NPS guidance on Cleaning Shared Vehicles; Current approved APPA JHA's.		
Available Personal Protective Equipment	Hand sanitizer; disinfectant (suitable for use on surfaces); surgical mask / comfort mask / cloth face covering; safety glasses/face shield; non-permeable gloves; disposable coveralls or apron depending on activity. Any additional PPE, required for a specific task as identified in approved APPA JHA's.		
Tools and Equipment Available Training	Working cell phone or 2-way radio, first aid kit. Dress for the weather and site conditions. Review current CDC Guidelines; Operational Leadership Training (TrailSafe Training); First Aid/CPR training; Check in/check-out procedures; Any other training required based on tasks to be performed as identified in currently approved APPA JHA's.		
7. TASKS/PROCEDURES General Work Duties	8. HAZARDS, POTENTIAL HAZARDS / INJURY SOURCE Exposure to COVID-19	9. ABATEMENT ACTIONS OR PROCEDURES Engineering Controls • Substitution • Administrative Controls • PPE	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay up to date with and follow appropriate CDC guidelines. Avoid touching hard surfaces including plastics, metals, woods, etc. Assume all hard surfaces may be contaminated with COVID-19. Practice social distancing. Stay at least 6' away from non-household members in the workplace. If a task requires working distances closer than 6-feet, stop work and redesign how the task is being performed to allow for at least 6' distance. If task cannot be performed observing 6' distancing, it is "HIGHLY" recommended that you wear a surgical mask / comfort mask / cloth face covering and eye protection and limit your exposure to less than 15 minutes. If you do work with someone closer than 6' for longer than 15 minutes, and you or the other person(s) are found to be positive with COVID-19 you may be subject to a 14-day quarantine based on current CDC guidelines. Communicate to others working around you when someone outside your work group is entering your work area. Maintain 6 foot distance at all times. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, mouth and/or footwear. Wash hands often with soap and water. Wash your hands for a min. of 20 seconds. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 	

		<p>60%–95% alcohol can be used where soap & water are not readily available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean & disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using EPA registered disinfectants or bleach solution as described by CDC by mixing: 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water. Practice Operational Leadership principles and assess your personal risk before conducting activities. Use SPE Risk Assessment & GAR to determine whether each specific work activity should take place. (See attached SPE/GAR Cards) Wash hands with soap and water and/or hand sanitizer prior to eating. Do not share food, drinks, or PPE with participants. When working with others, ensure there are enough tools/equipment available for all to have their own set. Clean and disinfect all tool/equipment sets prior to using and/or issuing to individuals using EPA registered disinfectants. Once tools/equipment are issued: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not mix/intermingle tools/equipment. Frequently wash hands often with soap and water and/or hand sanitizer. Individuals are responsible for accounting for and maintaining their own tool/equipment set. If tools/equipment are left unattended, thoroughly clean and disinfect tools/equipment before resuming operation. Do not share tools/equipment. However in the rare event tools/equipment sharing is unavoidable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thoroughly clean and disinfect tools/equipment before operational transition using EPA registered disinfectants. Wear task appropriate washable gloves. Wash hands often with soap and water and/or hand sanitizer. Do not touch your eyes, nose, mouth and/or footwear. Clean and disinfect tools/equipment when work/task is complete, or at least daily when in constant use.
General Tool / Equipment Use	Exposure to COVID-19	

Public Contact	Exposure to COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice CDC/public Health/NPS guidelines for social distancing (6-foot distance). It is "HIGHLY" recommended to wear face covering and safety glasses when working within 6 exposed feet of others. Maintain situational awareness. Communicate to others working around you when someone outside your work group is entering your work area. Maintain 6 foot distance at all times. Do not engage in social distancing enforcement. If needed, contact local law enforcement. Review SDS for products used to ensure proper use of protective equipment, employee knowledge and understanding and procedures Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 60% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's instructions for application and proper ventilation. Pay close attention to the "contact time" for each disinfectant used as some may have to sit on surfaces for 5-10 minutes. Follow EPA's guidance as listed on CDC's website. Optionally, prepare a bleach solution: 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water. Products with EPA-approved EPA-registered household disinfectant are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.). Remove washable/reusable gowns and over clothing by disposing in a dedicated container or laundry basket. Remove gloves by use of safety method: One glove removed and held by the opposite hand and turning the remaining glove inside out and disposed of in trash. Remove and clean safety glasses and spray shields. PPE trash may be disposed of in regular trash routes
Working with and Selecting Correct Cleaning/Disinfectant Materials	Exposure to COVID-19	
Remove / Contain / Dispose of PPE	Exposure to COVID-19	

10. OFFICIAL SIGNATURE <i>Kurt W. Speers</i> Previous edition is obsolete	11. TITLE Acting Chief Ranger CDSO	12. DATE 06/17/2020
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(over)

Operational Risk Management Analysis (ORMA)		
Rate 1-10 → Any category rated > 5 should receive specific mitigation		
1. Supervision	Presence of, qualified, accessibility & effectiveness. Clear Chain of command?	
2. Planning	Information available & clear, adequate time to plan, SOP's, pre-briefs, briefs, team input solicited?	
3. Contingency Resources	MOU's and planning in place. Shared communications plan?	
4. Communication	Radio communications, environment that values input, de-conflict?	
5. Team Selection	Level of training and experience. Cohesiveness & atmosphere that values input?	
6. Team Fitness	Physical & Mental State of the team? Consider rest, fatigue, morale, outside distractions?	
7. Environment	Threats, time of day, extreme temperatures, elevation, difficulty of terrain, terrain?	
8. Incident Complexity	Exposure time, severity & probability of mishap, potential for taxing staffing levels?	
Green (1-35)	Amber (36-60)	Red (61-90)
SEVERITY × PROBABILITY × EXPOSURE (SPE)		
SEVERITY	PROBABILITY	EXPOSURE
1. None or slight	1. Impossible or remote in any conditions	1. None or below average
2. Minimal	2. Unlikely under normal conditions	2. Average
3. Significant	3. About 50 / 50	3. Above average
4. Major	4. Greater than 50%	4. Great
5. Catastrophic	5. Very likely to happen	
VALUES	RISK LEVEL	ACTION
80-100	Very High	Discontinue, Stop
60-79	High	Immediate Correction
40-59	Substantial	Correction Required
20-39	Possible	Attention Needed
1-19	Slight	Possibly Acceptable

JHA Instructions (References-FSH 6709.11 and .12)

The JHA shall identify the location of the work project or activity, the name of employee(s) involved in the process, the date(s) of acknowledgment, and the name of the appropriate line officer approving the JHA. The line officer acknowledges that employees have read and understand the contents, have received the required training, and are qualified to perform the work project or activity.

Blocks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6: Self-explanatory.

Block 7: Identify all tasks and procedures associated with the work project or activity that have potential to cause injury or illness to personnel and damage to property or material. Include emergency evacuation procedures (EEP).

Block 8: Identify all known or suspect hazards associated with each respective task/procedure listed in block 7. For example:

- Research past accidents/incidents.
- Research the Health and Safety Code, FSH 6709.11 or other appropriate literature.
- Discuss the work project/activity with participants.
- Observe the work project/activity.
- A combination of the above.

Block 9: Identify appropriate actions to reduce or eliminate the hazards identified in block 8. Abatement measures listed below are in the order of the preferred abatement method:

- Engineering Controls (the most desirable method of abatement).
For example, ergonomically designed tools, equipment, and furniture.
- Substitution. For example, switching to high flash point non-toxic solvents.
- Administrative Controls. For example, limiting exposure by reducing the work schedule; establishing appropriate procedures and practices.
- PPE (least desirable method of abatement). For example, using hearing protection when working with or close to portable machines (chain saws, rock drills, and portable water pumps).

Emergency Evacuation Instructions (Reference FSH 6709.11)

Work supervisors and crew members are responsible for developing and discussing field emergency evacuation procedures (EEP) and alternatives in the event a person(s) becomes seriously ill or injured at the worksite.

Be prepared to provide the following information:

- Nature of the accident or injury (avoid using victim's name).
- Type of assistance needed, if any (ground, air, or water evacuation).
- Location of accident or injury, best access route into the worksite (road name/number), identifiable ground/air landmarks.
- Radio frequencies.
- Contact person.
- Local hazards to ground vehicles or aviation.
- Weather conditions (wind speed & direction, visibility, temperature).
- Topography.
- Number of individuals to be transported.
- Estimated weight of individuals for air/water evacuation.

The items listed above serve only as guidelines for the development of emergency evacuation procedures.

JHA and Emergency Evacuation Procedures Acknowledgment

We, the undersigned work leader and crew members, acknowledge participation in the development of this JHA (as applicable) and accompanying emergency evacuation procedures. We have thoroughly discussed and understand the provisions of each of these documents:

SIGNATURE	DATE	SIGNATURE	DATE
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e. A combination of the above.		
Block 10: The JHA must be reviewed and approved by a line officer. Attach a copy of the JHA as justification for purchase orders when procuring PPE.		
Blocks 11 and 12: Self-explanatory.		

Guidance for A.T. Trail Management and Fieldwork (June 17, 2020)

ATC, APPA, and the USFS required that all volunteers and staff suspend all trail-related activities when COVID-19 was spreading across the United States. As more hikers seek opportunities to safely recreate on the Appalachian Trail, all cooperative management partners recognize the need to protect trail resources and to provide a safe hiking experience.

The following protocols were developed by a task force of Appalachian Trail Conservancy staff, A.T. volunteer leaders, NPS-APPA and USFS staff. It will be updated periodically when new information about COVID-19 becomes available. This resource is intended to minimize the risk of exposure to the novel COVID-19 virus while staff and volunteers re-engage with trail management and fieldwork activities once these conditions are met:

- Local, state, and land management authorities have re-opened the trail in the area;
- Staff and Volunteers are clear of symptoms;
- Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment exists and is available for respective tasks

The procedures outlined here are based on evidence that the virus can be contracted through close association with an infected person or by contact with a contaminated surface. The virus can also be transmitted to others even before any symptoms are exhibited. The AT Adaptive Recovery Task Force is providing this guidance for staff and A.T. Clubs to limit the spread of and exposure to COVID-19 in a consistent manner. A.T. Clubs may offer members additional guidance to minimize risks.

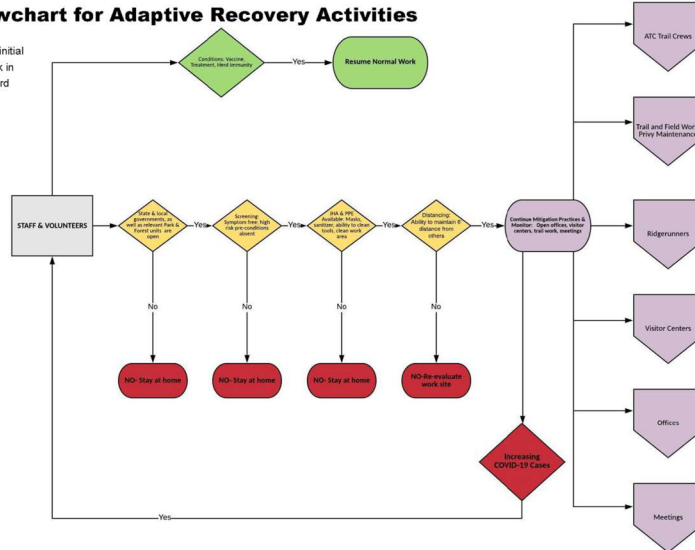
Volunteer activities are optional, and participation is at the discretion of the volunteer. Declining to work on one's section will not affect a volunteer's current status. Volunteers and staff who fall into a high risk category are advised to carefully assess travel and work outside their homes, and avoid all activities that could increase exposure to COVID-19.

Contained in this Document

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Decision Flowchart for Adaptive Recovery Activities

The following represents the initial decision process for any work in the field related to the standard operating procedures found within this document.



Phased Opening Protocols: (Re) Opening (Working in the Field)

Procedures for Trail work are based on an understanding that since local or site conditions are prone to change, providing phases offers perspectives to safely work in the field. Refer to the [A.T. Maintenance Risk Exposure Scale](#) to determine what activities are best suited to Phase 2 and 3 when states and public lands have re-opened.

Phase 1 is the period when new COVID-19 cases continue in the area without a decreasing rate, and during which time trail maintenance and fieldwork on the A.T. is essentially on a stand-down while efforts are made to flatten the transmission curve. During this time, only staff and volunteers that have been requested to address Trail emergencies or maintenance priorities are permitted to work or volunteer on the A.T.

Phase 2 is in effect when local COVID-19 cases have been diminishing for at least 14 days in the county where staff and volunteers reside, as well as in the county where work will take place.

Phase 3 is characterized by further diminished local, county-level cases of COVID-19.

Review A.T. County-level COVID- 19 map information - [HERE](#). 14-day county-level data - [HERE](#)

In all Phases:

- Establish and continue communication with local and State authorities to determine current infection levels and mitigation strategies in your community.
- [Protect](#) and support staff and volunteers who are at [higher risk](#)¹ for severe illness by advising everyone about the risks associated with COVID-19 during trail and field work.
- All staff and volunteers should routinely assess risks and adapt work to evolving conditions by using tools that help to assess risk (See [Risk Calculator App](#) and [CDC Self-Screening Tool](#)), and develop operational leadership through [Trail Safe Training](#).

Phase 1: Are COVID-19 cases increasing or are not decreasing in your area and work site? If, yes, then:

- Trail maintenance and emergency response is only for requested [workers](#)²
- Work activities should focus on:
 - Health, Life and Safety

Phase 2: Have local, county-level (home and work site) COVID-19 cases been mostly diminishing for 14 days.

- All staff and volunteers can re-engage with trail maintenance and fieldwork with no more than **four** staff or volunteers working together while maintaining social distancing.
- Work activities should focus on:
 - Trail Planning / Scouting
 - Health, Life, and Safety
 - Maintaining Trail Access
 - Identify and Document Resource Damage

Phase 3: Have local, county-level (home and work site) COVID-19 cases continued to diminish or not increase?

- All staff and volunteers can work with social distancing measures for groups up to **10 people**.

¹ Higher risk: People 65 years and older. People with and of the following conditions: chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma; serious heart conditions, immunocompromised, severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher), diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease.

² Land manager requests field support to address Trail emergencies and priorities.

- Work activities should focus on:
 - Health, Life, and Safety
 - Trail Planning
 - Maintaining Trail Access
 - Repairing Resource Damage that may include work beyond essential fundamental maintenance, provided the scope of work avoids closer social interaction necessary for some large projects
 - In-person training, when available from hosts, provided with appropriate social distancing.

Volunteer and Staff Management Considerations for Field Work

1.1 General Recommendations for Work Trips (Phases 1-3)

Clubs and staff leading work trips should:

- Ask individual volunteers to attest that they have read the [CDC guidelines](#) regarding underlying conditions that would put them at high risk of severe illness, and to participate in an activity only if they have determined that participation will not unduly jeopardize their safety.
- Update the template the organization uses for work-trip rosters to include a statement acknowledging review of above guidelines from CDC and their determination to participate.
- Volunteers and staff who have a fever, [symptoms](#), or have had exposure to a confirmed case within the 14 days prior to a work trip, should remain at home and not participate in the trip.
- If a volunteer or staff member from a work trip receives a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 within 14-days after a work trip, that volunteer is required to disclose this to their work trip leader and ATC regional office within 24-hours of discovery.
- Advise participants on work trips that if they do become ill following a workday to notify you as trip leader so you can communicate to others who may have been in recent contact.
- Determine any gaps in trail management areas due to volunteers' decisions to decline work, notify ATC regional staff, and temporarily reassign the trail section if/as needed.
- Cultivate a community of communication, transparency and empathy where disclosures are shared, managed, and acted upon without any stigma or discrimination.
- Work trips in the field for section maintenance or corridor work, by staff and volunteers, should have at least two people as much as possible.

1.2 ATC Staff Only: Healthy Operations (Phases 1-3)

- Implement flexible sick leave policies and practices, if feasible.
- Monitor absenteeism to identify any trends in employee absences due to illness. This might indicate spread of COVID-19 or other illness. Have a roster of trained back-up staff in order to maintain sufficient staffing levels.
- ATC's Human Resources staff is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns.
- Create a communication system for staff and families for self-reporting of symptoms and notification of exposures and closures.

2.1 Safety Operations for Trail and Field Work Activities

2.1.1. Preparing

Check for [signs and symptoms](#) (Phases 1-3)

- All staff and volunteers should establish routine, daily health checks, including temperature screening prior to any work trips.
- Require staff and volunteers to stay home if they are sick.

2.1.2 Promote [healthy hygiene practices](#) (Phases 1-3)

- All work parties should have adequate supplies to support healthy hygiene behaviors, including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol, cleaned cloth face masks, and tissues.
- All staff and volunteers should bring extra water and biodegradable soap to wash hands regularly throughout the day.
- Volunteers should independently, and leaders should especially, reinforce [washing hands](#). Volunteers and work trip leaders are encouraged to establish [handwash station](#) for use at the end of day before getting back in car. Hand sanitizers can be used when washing is not possible, being aware that it is less effective than washing.
- Ensure volunteers bring their own washable work gloves, rather than issuing loaner gloves. Clean after every use.
- Reiterate on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 at tailgate safety briefings. Include reminders to properly wash hands, promote everyday protective measures, and properly wear a face covering.

2.1.3 Intensify cleaning and disinfection (Phases 1-3)

- [Clean, sanitize, and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces (for example, all tools, equipment, vehicles) multiple times per day. Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants will work. Here is an approved [list of effective cleaners](#), but be sure to read the labels to make sure the cleaner is safe to use on the different surfaces.
- Do not share tools and equipment once group gear has been provided, including hand tools.
- Crew leaders (volunteer and staff) are responsible to wash, rinse and sanitize group tools, safety glasses, helmets, and other equipment at the end of the day before storing. Per CDC recommendations, unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronavirus when properly diluted. Prepare a bleach solution in well-ventilated area by mixing: 5 tablespoons (1/3 cup) bleach per gallon of water, or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water.
- Avoid use of items that are not easily cleaned, sanitized, or disinfected.
- Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants.

2.1.4 Ensure social distancing

Phase 2 and 3

- Plan for smaller work parties: **Phase 2 – group size limit of 4; Phase 3 - 10 or fewer people.**
- Prevent risk of transmitting COVID-19 by avoiding face-to-face and immediate contact (such as shaking hands, holding hands or high-fives).
- If group multi-day (no camping) work trips occur, ensure that trips include the same group of volunteers and staff each day, and that people respect social distancing / isolation overnight.

- Ensure your sign-in roster is accurate for each outing. Trip leader should write down names and ask for pre-filled waivers.
 - Devise safe ways to collect required waivers, such as an electronic waiver to complete pre-trip, or dropping waivers in a plastic bag. It is especially important to keep updated work trip rosters if you need to identify people retroactively who may have been together before a positive diagnosis.
 - Require advanced registration for work events rather than ad hoc meetings at rendezvous locations to guarantee not more than 10 people at a single location. Turn away or align separate activity leaders and alternative rendezvous locations for subsequent registrations up to group sizes of 10.
 - Do not carpool with anyone other than a household member. Despite environmental impacts, public health takes priority.
 - Space out work on trail management and fieldwork activities and while seated for breaks.
 - Not all locations on the Trail are “socially isolated” due to the scenic nature of the site, the proximity to population centers, or ease of access. Volunteers planning for work at higher visitation sites should adapt to changing conditions. It may be necessary to end planned trail work if the area becomes too crowded to maintain sufficient social distancing.
 - Each person should buy, store and prepare their own meals, drinks, and snacks.
-

Travel Considerations - (Phase 2 and 3)

- Beyond the work activity, staff and volunteers should weigh the risk of potential exposure by [traveling to the Trail](#). When traveling to or from the Trail for work trips, avoid and generally minimize stops for food, gas, restrooms, etc.
 - One person or household per vehicle. No ride sharing.
 - Keep disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer in the vehicle as an easy and effective preventive measure to disinfect all touchpoints before and after use, including door handle, key fob, steering wheel, inside door buttons, seat belts, arm rests, gear shifters and touchscreens.
 - Pumping gas
 - Have disinfectant wipes handy for wiping down the gas pump handle and the payment keypad before pumping.
 - Carry disposable nitrile or latex gloves in your car to use when gripping the pump handle and using the keypad. Short of that, use paper towels that are available at the pump or have some with you to cover your hands when you grip the handle.
 - Invert the gloves and throw them away, and also any paper towels you might have used.
 - Use hand sanitizer to make sure your hands are clean after you’re done and before you get back into your car.
 - Wash hands immediately upon returning home.
-

Overnight Site Management

Privy maintenance includes everything from routine cleaning and knocking down the “cone” to replacing the compost bin in a moldering privy and relocating a riser. In a time of active COVID-19 transmission, privy maintenance may be among the riskiest tasks that volunteers and staff undertake. As such, in most cases, shelters and privies will not be cleaned and maintained until further notice.

A.T. Shelter and Privy Advisory Notice – Post at Trailheads, Shelters, on Social Media and Websites

Due to the difficulty of social distancing and the possibility of the virus being transmitted on surfaces, hikers are advised to avoid shelters and picnic tables. Also note that privies are currently not being maintained; to avoid overflowing privies and placing extra burdens on volunteers when they return to the field, please bring a trowel to dig a cathole.

Please note that many shelters and privies are officially closed, even if they are not be posted closed at the site location.

Shelters and Privies: Phases 1 - 3

- Shelters and privies will not be cleaned and maintained by volunteers until further notice.
 - Post provided signage at trailheads and at overnight sites indicating that shelters and privies are not disinfected for COVID-19.
 - If privies and shelters are officially closed by the land managing agency (NPS, USFS, state agencies), indicate this on the signage as well.

Privy Maintenance: Phase 2-3 (Exceptions)

Exceptions to privy cleaning and maintenance will be made on a case-by-case basis with consultation among A.T. club representatives, ATC regional staff, and agency partners. Partners will take into consideration thin soils, inability to dig cat-holes, presence of dedicated caretakers, and resource damage. To foster good communication among regional A.T. Clubs, Regional Partnership Committees should be informed about all active privy maintenance during COVID-19 mitigation phases 2 and 3.

Catholes: Locate cat holes at least 200 feet (about 70 adult steps) from water, trails and camp. Select an inconspicuous site where other people will be unlikely to walk or camp. With a small trowel, dig a hole 6-8 inches deep and 4-6 inches in diameter. The cat hole should be covered and disguised with natural materials when finished. Pack out toilet paper. If camping in the area for more than one night, or if camping with a large group, cat hole sites should be widely dispersed. More information [HERE](#) that can be used to provide guidance at trailheads.

All privy maintenance should strictly follow current health and safety guidelines to avoid exposure to COVID-19 and other transmittable diseases. (See [ATC Backcountry Sanitation Manual](#))

Privy cleaning and maintenance PPE

- Disposable coveralls
- Disposable Masks
- Rubber gloves
- Bleach Wipes
- Contractor Bags (at least 2)
- Bio-hazard Bag(s)
- Shovel or Rake
- Small Trash Bag (for wipes)

Trash Pick-up: Phases 2 - 3

- PPE Required: Non-permeable gloves, disinfectant, and hand sanitizer, trash pick-up tools, disposable or washable coveralls, eye protection.
- Training Required: Blood Borne Pathogen (BBP) Training and/or BBP training as provided through First Aid training for trash pick up at high risk sites and for high risk trash items.
- If emptying trash receptacle, disinfect all trash receptacle touch surfaces before emptying.
- When picking-up loose trash, utilize trash picker poles/rigs whenever possible and carefully place trash in trash bags/receptacles, taking care to avoid unnecessary bodily contact with trash bags/receptacles.
- Place sealed/tied trash bags in the vehicle securely away from all passengers.
- Carefully remove gloves and coveralls and dispose of them in a trash receptacle. Remove coveralls first, and then gloves.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol as soon as possible.

Monitoring**Plan for when a staff member or volunteer becomes sick (Phases 1-3)**

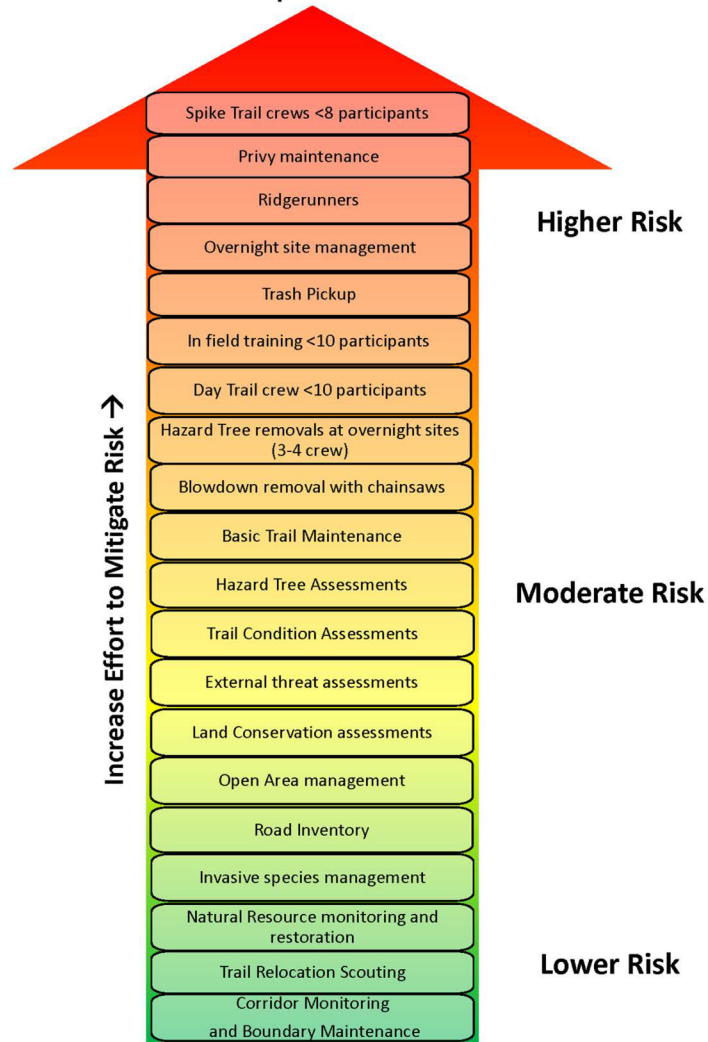
- Identify an area to separate anyone who exhibits COVID-like symptoms during Trail and fieldwork.
- Procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes sick during a work trip:
 - If a volunteer or staff become sick on a work trip and can safely return home in a personal vehicle without stopping, then those individuals should immediately leave the work site.
 - If sick volunteers or staff are not able to safely leave the work site, first responders should use all available means to avoid possible exposure to COVID-19 while providing necessary care in the field. Call 911.
- Once a volunteer or staff member is receiving necessary care, notify others (staff, volunteers, etc) that someone they have been in contact with has COVID-like symptoms and that you have notified them to be vigilant in monitoring their own health. Don't confirm or deny when asked who the coworker or volunteer is — remind staff and volunteers that medical information is private and you must respect everyone's rights. Also, notify local health officials of any possible case of COVID-19 and provide information they request.
- Wait 24 hours before you clean or disinfect any surface that may have become infected and is exposed to other staff, volunteers, or hikers to reduce risk to individuals cleaning. If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, wait as long as possible. Ensure safe and correct application of disinfectants.
- Advise sick staff members and volunteers not to return until they have met CDC [criteria to discontinue home isolation](#).
- Inform anyone exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms, and to follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- Anyone that has had prolonged close contact with a sick individual will need to follow quarantine guidelines and cannot return to trail work.

Re-evaluation and ‘Phasing Down’ Field Operations

Phases 1-3

- It is very important to check State and local health department notices daily about spread of COVID-19 in the area and adjust operations accordingly.
 - When COVID-19 cases are significantly increasing, trail and field work should scale back or cease operations.
-

Appalachian Trail Maintenance Activities COVID-19 Exposure Risk Scale*



* Based on the potential to be in another person's air space or for being exposed to a contaminated surface

Optional Form 301a (09/2010)
USDA-USDI

OMB 0596-0080 (Expires 12/2013)

I understand that I will not receive any compensation for the above service and that volunteers are NOT considered Federal employees for any purpose other than tort claims and injury compensation. I understand that volunteer service is not creditable for leave accrual or any other employee benefits. I also understand that either the government or I may cancel this agreement at any time by notifying the other party.

I understand that my volunteer position may require a reference check, background investigation, and/or a criminal history inquiry in order for me to perform my duties.

I understand that all publications, films, slides, videos, artistic or similar endeavors, resulting from my volunteer services as specifically stated in the attached job description, will become the property of the United States, and as such, will be in the public domain and not subject to copyright laws.

I understand the health and physical condition requirements for doing the work as described in the job description and at the project location, and certify that the statement I have checked below is true:

☐ I know of no medical condition or physical limitation that may adversely affect my ability to provide this service.

☐ I do know of a medical condition or physical limitation that may adversely affect my ability to provide this service and have explained it to _____
(Name of Agency Official)

I do hereby volunteer my services as described above, to assist in agency-authorized work. I agree to follow all applicable safety guidelines.

(Signature of Volunteer)

(Date)

The above - named agency agrees, while this arrangement is in effect, to provide such materials, equipment, and facilities that are available and needed to perform the service described above, and to consider you as a Federal employee only for the purposes of tort claims and injury compensation to the extent not covered by your volunteer group, if any.

(Signature of Government Representative)

(Date)

Termination of Agreement

Volunteer requests formal evaluation ☐ Yes ☐ No Evaluation Completed _____
(Date)

Agreement terminated on _____
(Date) _____
(Signature of Government Representative)

Public Burden Statement

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Appalachian Trail Community™, Businesses, & Service Providers COVID-19 Impact Report

[Click here to view the map of Confirmed COVID-19 cases along the A.T.](#)

This report summarizes how the COVID-19 crisis has impacted communities along the Appalachian Trail (A.T.), with a focus on service providers and businesses. The data collected from hundreds of interviews and survey responses summarized in this report informs our advocacy decisions, programmatic recommendations, and our efforts to pursue short and long-term recovery opportunities.



**APPALACHIAN TRAIL
CONSERVANCY®**

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Background

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is best known as an iconic hiking destination, connecting many of the Eastern United States' most beloved public lands. Across 14 states, it also connects dozens of adjacent communities large and small, supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs who provide services to the millions of visitors who hike on the A.T. each year. These Appalachian towns and businesses are an integral part of the Trail's unique culture and history. Hostels, restaurants, outfitters, and other businesses are a treasured part of the A.T. experience, and in many cases more memorable than the hiking journey itself.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) is the non-profit tasked with overseeing the management and maintenance of the Trail to ensure its longevity as an international treasure for future generations. The ATC formally recognizes gateway communities as vital partners through its A.T. Community™ program. Beyond the ~50 officially designated A.T. Communities™, dozens of other communities and hundreds of businesses form a vast informal network of hiker support services.

Key Objectives:

- Document and analyze COVID-19 impacts to local, small, and rural businesses in communities near the A.T.
- Identify critical needs for support
- Work with local leaders to determine the best course of action, while advocating for the alignment of state and federal funds to meet local needs
- Strengthen our network so resources can be shared as they become available
- Assist communities along the A.T. in becoming safe, financially secure, and poised to thrive once outdoor recreation tourism resumes

COVID-19 Response

As COVID-19 became a reality in the U.S., many people viewed a long hike on the A.T. and other national parks as the perfect place to practice social distancing recommendations. However, it quickly became apparent that, by traveling from town to town, long distance hikers could unknowingly bring the disease to rural communities in addition to putting themselves at risk. We started to see thousands flocking to our national parks, like the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, creating crowded parking areas and recreation facilities. To manage and protect visitors, staff, land managers, communities, and the Trail's health, the ATC requested those planning a long-distance hike to postpone or cancel, and, more significantly, requested all Trail users stay home.

While these recommendations were made with the health and safety of the A.T.'s neighbors in mind, we were acutely aware of the economic repercussions that would affect the businesses along the Trail. In hopes of supporting and advocating on behalf of trailside communities, the ATC quickly drafted a survey for A.T. Community™ partners and service providers to track and measure the impacts of the pandemic. Seasonal ridgerunners who had recently been pulled from their field-based work in the south were re-assigned to survey business owners by phone.



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COVID-19 Response - *continued*



Scope of Analysis

Over 1,400 service providers and small businesses were contacted by email or phone. Of the total responses, 93 surveys were filled out online and 228 were completed over the phone with ATC staff.

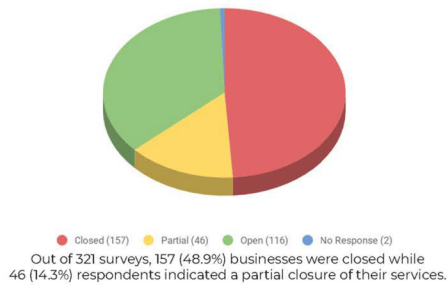
Responses were collected from March 24 to April 16, 2020. This was a period of rapid change as local, state, and federal governments issued a variety of recommendations, shelter-in-place, and closure orders.

Survey Results

The majority of the businesses near the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) are experiencing negative economic impacts or severe financial losses due to the restrictions and mandates caused by the COVID-19 global health pandemic.

Survey responses by state
Georgia = 29
North Carolina = 47
Tennessee = 24
Virginia = 68
West Virginia = 6
Maryland = 3
Pennsylvania = 32
New Jersey = 5
New York = 14
Connecticut = 6
Massachusetts = 19
Vermont = 26
New Hampshire = 22
Maine = 20

Status of Business During COVID-19



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Thematic Analysis and Approach

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and survey questions. Thematic analysis is a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed to capture the concepts within the data set.

The "COVID-19 Impact Survey for Appalachian Trail Communities and Service Providers," was emailed to over 1,000 service providers and A.T. Communities™ on March 23rd and April 1st, 2020. Two ATC staff placed phone calls to those service providers without an email address on file, providing the interview based on survey questions and filled out questionnaires on behalf of the business. Financial impact was divided into two categories, dollars lost and percent lost for 2020.

When collecting and analyzing this data: It was assumed that businesses were familiar with the ATC, the pandemic would have a financial impact, and estimates of the impact could change in response to official guidance. Below are some examples of the questions asked on the Survey to help compile data for this report.

- What is the status of your business?
- What types of services does your business provide?
- Where is your business located and are you located in a designated A.T. Community™?
- How has COVID-19 impacted the income of your business?
- What is your estimated income loss or percentage of lost income?
- What are your concerns about the impact of COVID-19?



Harlem Valley, New York A.T. Community™ designation ceremony

**157 Respondents (49.1%)
located in an A.T. Community™**

"Small towns and rural areas are at a special risk of the pandemic spreading and affecting them. I don't want my area where there are many elderly to be at increased risk and bringing strangers from other areas in would be irresponsible. This issue is becoming divisive in the trail community which is very sad to see. We love hikers and what we do, but can't risk our family's health."

-Tennessee Service Provider

"Lack of government action in our community, combined with COVID-19 virus fears, has put us in an impossible situation...with lack of action from Georgia's state government, we had to make some extremely difficult decisions on our own regarding our service to our customers that have drastically impacted our revenue. Georgia's governor has failed the small business community in the North Georgia mountains."

-Georgia Service Provider

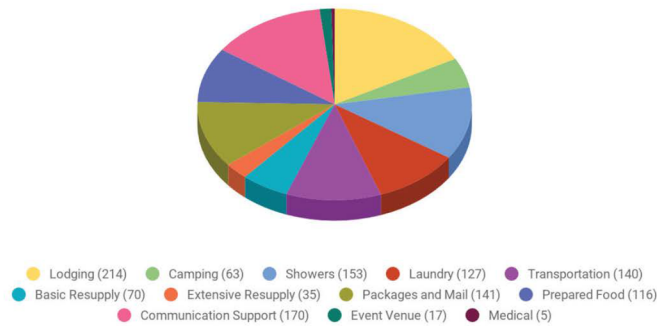


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Types of Businesses

The responses were collected from a variety of small businesses, local organizations, and A.T. communities connected to the A.T. to varying degrees. Those who were surveyed include over forty (40) A.T. Gateway Communities recognized in the Appalachian Trail Community™ program. These towns and cities are considered assets by all that use the A.T., and many of these towns act as good friends and neighbors to the Trail. We received responses from service providers offering hikers some or many of the following:

Services Offered



Themes

Based on the responses collected through the survey, eight (8) themes were identified as categorized below:

1. Concern of financial losses and/or the closure of their business.

Theme #1:

"Awful. We've have to close our doors. We are really taking it on the chin. We have spent years building up this business and are risking our livelihoods and our children's futures for this. We are not sure if we will survive this. Many businesses along the trail will go under from this. I hope that years from now we will be able to look back on this and say that it was all worth it. Right now, I'm not so sure."

2. Concerns about COVID-19 coming to their community and/or concern around the spread of the virus in general.

Theme #2:

"We are closed due to precautions for the CoronaVirus. We do not want to be a part of spreading the virus. We have no idea how to predict how long we will be closed. We will wait for the ATC and CDC to say it's safe to reopen."

Themes - continued

3. Concerns about the impact on the social, cultural, and health aspects of the A.T. community or their local community.

Theme #3:

"Very torn over what to do. So many businesses are shutting down that hikers who are left on trail are in a tight spot. We want to protect our town but also see the need to help the hikers."

4. Government or official recommendations being a contributing factor behind changes in their operations.

Theme #4:

"Our Governor has said a month or longer. We are a 76 year old family run business. This is devastating for us. We make a lot of our income from thru-hikers and day trippers."

5. Too soon to evaluate the financial impact of COVID-19.

Theme #5:

"We are one of the more stable hotels right now due to housing GA Power employees while they are up here working. Have had GA Power employees for the past 2 weeks and will have them for at least the next 2 weeks as they are considered essential employees."

6. No concerns about the impact of COVID-19.

Theme #6:

"Hardly at all thank God."

7. Personal health concerns specific to their family or household.

Theme #7:

"Had rented to someone from New York City for a week, but they checked out Sunday. We were nervous the whole time they were staying. Once they checked out we decided to close for at least 2 months. We are not going to go in to clean for at least 6 days to help ensure our safety."

8. New/re-opened businesses without a financial foundation.

Theme #8:

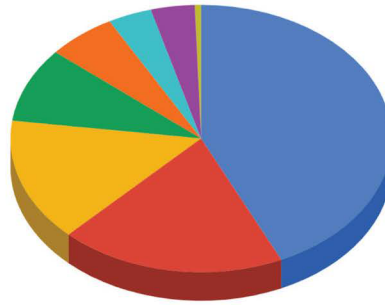
"We are a brand new business that just opened in Oct of 2019. This epidemic is affecting us more than businesses that are more mature. Most all non-essentials products have come to a screeching halt. We have read that stimulus package support for businesses will require two years worth of business financials. We wonder where we will fit into this process as we don't even have 1 full year of financial data to provide."

The analysis of these themed categories reveals a high percentage (81%) of respondents harboring concerns over the financial losses and/or the possible closure of their business. This concern is depicted in the graph below, along with the percentages of other concerns expressed within each of the eight identified themes.

Themes - continued

Concerns by Category

- 81% concern of financial losses and/or the closure of their business.
- 36 % concern about COVID-19 coming to their community and/or concern around the spread of the virus.
- 28.7% concern for the A.T. community or local community.
- 17% government or official recommendations being a factor behind changes in their operations.
- 11% too soon to evaluate the economic impact of COVID-19.
- 7% no concerns about the impact of COVID-19.
- 7% personal concern, specific to their family or household.
- 1% new/re-opened businesses without a financial foundation.



Financial Impact Results

The majority of survey respondents in this report indicated that their business was closed due to the impacts of COVID-19. We found that closed, open, and partially open businesses suffered financially or anticipated that they would suffer as the cyclical nature of the hiking season reached their place of business. The analysis of the eight themed categories revealed 256 (81%) of respondents harboring concerns over financial losses and/or the possible closure of their business. The second-most recorded consideration, reaching 115 (36.8%), expressed concerns about COVID-19 coming into their community and the general spread of the virus. Financial loss, or the threat thereof, was by far the greatest recorded concern from those who completed the survey.



Sunrise Grocery in Blairsville, GA becomes an A.T. Community™ Supporter

Via the survey data, **respondents estimated their financial losses for 2020 with a median loss of \$30,000 per establishment.** The responses often indicated that they had no way of knowing what duration of time the COVID-19 impacts would affect them. Estimates for loss of income were based on varying timeframes, with some businesses initially estimating closures of just two weeks, and others projecting as long as 18 months. Respondents indicated the percentage of their annual business they have lost, or anticipated losing throughout 2020, with an **average of 69.6% income lost per establishment.**

Where do we go from here?

This global health pandemic will likely be devastating to rural economies with a slow recovery period. Communities along the A.T. rely heavily on recreation tourism compared to those in urban communities.

ATC is using this data to share impacts to small businesses and rural economies so that we can advocate on behalf of our gateway communities. Below there is an appendix full of resources for small businesses and rural economies in need of immediate or future support. ATC will be sharing this impact report widely, with Congressional and State representatives. Lastly, we continue to be open to ongoing suggestions for support. Please email atcommunities@appalachian-trail.org with your ideas.



Outside Diane's Twist Ice Cream Parlor in Cheshire, MA

Appendix: Resources

General Support:

Health Resource and Services Administration: Rural Community Programs

- The Community-Based Division (CBD) grant programs provide funding to increase access to care in rural communities and to address their unique health care challenges.

USDA: Community Development Resources

- Rural information center providing access to information for community development in a variety of subject areas.

Useful Community Development: Community Improvement Concept and Specifics

- For people who aren't community development professionals, the site provides definitions and basic concepts, tells you plainly what usually works and what doesn't, and explains the jargon professionals use so you can understand and apply their advice.

Rural Health Information Hub: Your First Stop for Rural Health Information

- Discover the latest funding and opportunities to support rural health. Information about applying for grants to support rural health projects including frequently asked questions.

New models, business practices, and campaign examples:

Virginia's Blue Ridge: Worth the Wait

- A directory of ways to enjoy Virginia's Blue Ridge through virtual visitation, online shopping, and curbside pickup plus a listing of local campaigns and fundraisers.

Giles County, VA: 50% More Voucher

- Giles County and the Towns of Pembroke, Pearisburg, Narrows, Rich Creek and Glen Lyn are promoting and selling gift certificates which can be purchased for \$20 and redeemed at a face value of \$30 in local dining and lodging businesses.



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Appendix: Resources - *continued*

Local Business Recovery Fund

- Grants available to small businesses and sole proprietorships in the arts/entertainment/recreation, accommodation and food services, retail trade, and manufacturing sectors in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

Abingdon, VA: We'll Be Waiting For You

- VTC has put together a three-phase short-term brand strategy that will get us through this crisis. Phase I, support and adaptation, has just launched: meet travelers where they are by offering beautiful, scenic visuals.

Resources for Small Businesses:

General Support

U.S. Small Business Administration: Small Business Guidance & Loan Resources

- A federal agency with resources for small business owners and entrepreneurs that oversees the implementation of programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) as outlined by the CARES ACT. Check back often as additional funding for programs such as PPP is secured.
- Small Business Development Centers. Note: Please make an effort to contact these organizations via email or phone before proceeding to a physical location. Many organizations are providing teleworking options for staff and while support is still available, some business may be conducted virtually.
- University of Georgia SBDC
- North Carolina SBTDC: Your Business. Better.
- Tennessee SBDC
- Virginia SBDC
- West Virginia SBDC
- Maryland SBDC
- Pennsylvania SBDC
- New Jersey SBDC
- New York SBDC
- Connecticut SBDC
- Massachusetts SBDC
- Vermont SBDC
- New Hampshire SBDC
- Maine SBDC

Center for Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship: Loan and Grants Searchable Database

- (CASE) at Duke's Fuqua School of Business has built a comprehensive, searchable database that includes grants, loans, and other cash equivalents to support entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and businesses globally. You can upload grant and loan opportunities as well.

The Conservation Fund: Ideas and Solutions for Gateway and Rural Communities

- A collection of resources for communities tied to tourism and outdoor recreation.



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Appendix: Resources - *continued*

The Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC): Resources for Women-Owned Businesses in Response to COVID-19

- Across the country, as the nation responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, WBENC-Certified WBEs are helping in big ways and small, by innovating, scaling up to meet demand, partnering to expand capabilities, and donating to help communities and frontline workers in need.

Tory Burch Foundation

- Transformed into a resource hub for women-led small businesses during the COVID-19 crisis.

The American Hotel and Lodging Association: COVID-19 Resource Center

- An organization for members of the hotel and lodging industry that provides resources and support.

Destination International: Covid-19 Response and Recovery Hub

- Destinations International's number one goal is to give our members the tools they need, which includes accurate and up-to-date information as it pertains to the effects of coronavirus on the travel, tourism and meetings industry.

Hello Alice

- COVID-19 business resource center with real-world funding, resources, and support for small business owners impacted by the pandemic.

Grants

GrantStation.com

- Resource for finding grants from foundations, federal, and state government sources (press red bar at the top of the page to access COVID-19 funding opportunities and resources)

Grants.gov

- Grants learning center explains basics about the grant lifecycle and management, policies, eligibility, and terms. Federal grant search tool.

NonprofitReady.org

- Free nonprofit training including grant writing, fundraising, and nonprofit finance.

NonprofitGuides.org

- Free grant writing tools for nonprofit organizations including grant writing guides, links to grantors, and FAQs.

USA Grant Applications

- Training materials on how and where to apply for funding. Includes information on business grants geared towards small businesses, women owned businesses, minority grants, and business grants for veterans.

Red Backpack Fund

- Grants of \$5,000 each to female entrepreneurs in the U.S. to help alleviate the immediate needs and support the long-term recovery of those impacted by COVID-19.



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Appendix: Resources - *continued*

Loans

Small Business Administration Economic Injury Disaster Loan:

- Make sure to only check the boxes for COVID-19 and economic distress

Economic Development Administration Revolving Loan Fund: programs organized by state (scroll down for the search by state) full of existing loan programs for small businesses

- EDA provides Economic Adjustment Assistance (PDF) grants to eligible recipients to capitalize or recapitalize lending programs that service businesses that cannot otherwise obtain traditional bank financing

Labor Laws and Employer Responsibilities

The Center for American Progress

- Article: Rural Americans Are Vulnerable to the Coronavirus
- Insights about how different minority groups and labor groups are impacted by COVID-19.

U.S. Department of Labor

- OSHA Responsibilities and guidance for preparing workplaces for coronavirus.



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Small business needs during and after the coronavirus crisis: A roadmap to recovery

From plunging revenues to shuttered storefronts, it's no secret that the COVID-19 public health crisis has driven too many small businesses to the brink of collapse. Stories and data from business owners across the country, including from our network of 65,000 small businesses, have illuminated the dire reality of what they are facing. As we start to reopen our economy this month, it's critical that policymakers understand their needs and focus on enacting policies to bolster Main Street's recovery and long-term success.

More American jobs are created by entrepreneurs than any other way—small businesses employ half the private-sector workforce and create two-thirds of all net new jobs. That's 60 million individuals who depend on small businesses for their livelihood, which is vitally important in underserved communities and communities of color. Yet, government policies too frequently ignore—and sometimes hinder—small businesses from reaching their full potential. Indeed, Small Business Majority's [state polling](#) found a mere 12% of small business owners feel their government officials understand their needs.¹

While government officials have historically favored legislation that benefits big business over small and new businesses, the pandemic's impact on the small business community has been front and center during the crisis. Importantly, this emergency has exposed fundamental inequities in our economy that favor large, politically-connected corporations and white-owned businesses over the diverse Main Street businesses and solo enterprises that drive our economy. This includes vast differences in the ability to access responsible capital, obtain health coverage and other critical benefits for entrepreneurs and their employees, and compete in an economic system that has favored anti-competitive consolidation over economic democracy.

Congress has taken some steps to address these needs by funding emergency small business loan programs, but it is not enough to ensure businesses recover. These loan programs are slow, inefficient and convoluted and have left millions of small businesses behind, particularly the smallest businesses and those owned by people of color. And for those who have received a loan, the guidelines are so unclear that some business owners are afraid to use the money in case a misstep forfeits their chances of loan forgiveness.

It's clear that we need bold action to ensure that small businesses can recover and be better positioned to withstand the next crisis. **This is why we're calling on Congress and state legislatures to put small business needs at the front and center of all economic policymaking.**

To better educate policymakers and other stakeholders about the importance of promoting a stronger infrastructure for our small business economy, this document outlines (1) the obstacles small businesses face today, (2) their views on policy solutions and (3) short and long-term recommendations to promote a stronger Main Street for the future.

The state of small businesses during COVID-19

The spread of COVID-19 around the country has already had a devastating impact on small businesses. In fact, at least 100,000 American small businesses, have already closed their doors permanently.²

¹ Small Business Majority, "Small business owners say government doesn't understand their concerns, need help with healthcare costs and other challenges", August 2019, <https://smallbusinessmajority.org/our-research/entrepreneurship-freelance-economy/small-business-owners-say-government-doesn-t-understand-their-concerns-need-help-healthcare-costs-and-other-challenges>

² The Washington Post, "Small business used to define America's economy. The pandemic could change that forever." May 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/12/small-business-used-define-americas-economy-pandemic-could-end-that-forever/>

Meanwhile, furlough rates increased 138% from March to April. Scientific opinion polling conducted on behalf of Small Business Majority in April revealed the dismal state of small businesses and what we stand to lose if Congress doesn't act to provide additional robust assistance to small businesses.

An astounding 9 in 10 reported the coronavirus had already impacted their business in the first few weeks of the crisis, with 43% saying it had a severe negative impact. Similarly, 41% reported their revenues had declined by more than 50% since the COVID-19 crisis had begun. And a whopping 1 in 3 small businesses had already closed in April, with another 14% contemplating closure.

Additionally, small businesses reported widespread layoffs and furloughs: 4 in 10 had permanently laid off their employees, 56% had furloughed employees and most (72%) had reduced hours, salary or both for employees as a result of the crisis. One in three had permanently laid off, furloughed or reduced the hours/salary of their entire workforce.

Meanwhile, the emergency loan programs funded by Congress have not done enough to stem these losses. While the retail, hospitality, and food service industries have represented 65% of job losses, these industries received only 9% of approved Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans during the first round of lending before the funds ran dry. And black and Latino-owned businesses have been completely left behind by the loan program. A recent survey found a mere 12% that applied for PPP received the amount they asked for, and half anticipate being forced to close permanently in the next six months.³

Additionally, data on the first round of funding from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) revealed that bigger businesses were reaping the benefits of PPP, with 70% of the money allocated to loans of more than \$350,000. This size loan is not going to the smallest businesses as most small firms request smaller-dollar loans when seeking capital—in 2019, most small businesses who sought financing (57%) applied for loans under \$100,000.⁴

While current data on the second round of funding indicate that more smaller-dollar loans are being approved, small businesses that lack banking relationships are still struggling to access financing. This is particularly concerning as women and minority-owned businesses are historically left behind by traditional financing institutions. Additionally, because the loans are tied closely to maintaining payroll and don't adequately address the fact that small businesses have other expensive overhead costs like rent and utilities, the loans don't do enough to ensure small businesses have the means to survive the crisis.

Small business views on policy solutions

As the data above makes clear, small businesses need more from policymakers just to survive the immediate crisis. Small Business Majority's recent polling found 53% of small businesses say the CARES Act, the initial \$2 trillion stimulus package passed by Congress in March, was a good first step to address the challenges they're facing, but they believe much more small business assistance is needed.

Most small businesses (92%) say what they need from the federal government to help them survive the crisis is direct grant assistance. Two-thirds (66%) strongly support direct cash grants to help ensure small businesses can recover. More than 6,500 business owners in our network have signed a letter advocating direct grants approach.

Small businesses identified a number of additional solutions that would help the small business community obtain the relief it needs to make it through the crisis, including the following:

- Financial assistance for rent, mortgage and utility payments, not tied to maintaining payroll (86% support).

³ UnidosUS, "First COVID-19 Survey of Black and Latino Small-Business Owners Reveals Dire Economic Future, Inaccessible and Insufficient Government Relief Funds," May 2020, <https://www.unidosus.org/about-us/media/press/releases/051820-UnidosUS-Press-Release-COVID-19-Survey-Black-and-Latino-Small-Business>

⁴ The Federal Reserve Banks of the United States, "Report on Employer Firms 2019: Small Business Credit Survey," April 2019, <https://www.fedsmallbusiness.org/medialibrary/fedsmallbusiness/files/2019/sbcs-employer-firms-report.pdf>

- Forbearance on all small business debt, not just current SBA loans as provided by the CARES Act (86% support).
- Increasing funding for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which provide loans to the most underserved small businesses (84% support).
- A moratorium on increased unemployment insurance taxes for two years (83% support).

As government officials consider additional proposals to spur economic recovery, it's critical that they consider small businesses' views on these issues and give entrepreneurs a prominent seat at the table.

Policy recommendations to ensure Main Street recovers and thrives

Our nation's policymakers must focus closely on Main Street when crafting short-and long-term solutions to the COVID-19 crisis. This includes addressing significant problems with the current emergency small business loan programs and enacting policies to better position the small businesses that are the backbone of our economy for success.

Provide grant assistance to ensure small businesses stay afloat

Small businesses that are unable to maintain payroll or have operational costs that rival or exceed the cost of payroll, desperately need direct grant assistance. We recommend allocating \$600 billion in funding for direct grants to ensure that a pool of money is available for small businesses while avoiding the many problems with PPP. These grants can be administered through the IRS using a simple application.

Immediate Policy Needs:

- Allocate grants to cover small businesses with up to 100 employees, including the self-employed.
- Pay businesses to cover four months of actual payroll up to \$20,000 per employee (\$60,000 annual salary). This calculation would be based on one-third of their annual 2019 payroll, and for those businesses that did not exist in 2019, would be based on 133% of their January-March 2020 payroll (four-months equivalent). All amounts granted would be reduced by any forgivable loans received under the current PPP program.
- Pay businesses an additional amount of up to 10% of annual gross receipts (30% of four-months gross receipts) to cover any legitimate operational expenses (including additional payroll) over a four-month period at the small business's discretion. This calculation would be based upon 2019 gross receipts, and for businesses that did not exist in 2019, the maximum amount would be 40% of gross receipts for January-March 2020 (equivalent to 30% over four months). All amounts granted would be reduced by any grants received under the current EIDL program.

Currently there are numerous legislative proposals in Congress that would provide targeted grant/tax relief to very small businesses with anywhere from 10-50 employees (depending on the proposal). There are also proposals for relief that provide flexible grants to support payroll and non-payroll expenses.

Reform the Payroll Protection Program (PPP)

Immediate Policy Needs:

- Forgive all loans under \$150,000 so small businesses do not have to navigate a convoluted loan forgiveness process in the midst of keeping their business afloat.
- Eliminate the current requirement that at least 60% of the loan funds be used for payroll costs in order to be forgiven, thus increasing the amount small businesses can use for other costs to keep their business afloat. Most small businesses are not able to meet the 60% threshold, which means they will incur debt if the PPP rules are not amended.

- Guarantee that existing borrowers also have five years to pay back any unforgivable portions of the loan instead of the current two years.
- Allow borrowers to apply for a second round of PPP funding.
- Ensure PPP funding is open for business owners who have been formerly incarcerated.
- Provide lenders a minimum processing fee of \$2,500 per loan to ensure lenders do not lose money by processing small-dollar loans or cherry pick larger loans.
- Expand the percentage of PPP funds set aside specifically for CDFIs, Minority Depository Institutions (MDIs), rural loan institutions and other mission-driven lenders.
- Reverse the IRS ruling that prohibits payroll and rent tax deductions for expenses incurred with the PPP.

Provide robust funding for business support services

Small business owners are desperate for education and guidance right now. We urge more short and long-term funding for business assistance centers that provide resources to business owners. This is particularly needed as many small business owners are taking on more debt or seeking financing for the first time. Many businesses are also being forced to rethink their entire business model and adapt to a rapidly changing economic environment.

Immediate Policy Needs:

- Provide more immediate funding and resources for business assistance providers that provide vital education to business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs such as Small Business Development Centers, Women's Business Centers and the Minority Business Development Agency.
- Significantly expand state funding (including federal funding to states) for small business technical assistance programs to ensure small businesses receive access to free and low-cost counseling, mentoring and networking during and after the coronavirus pandemic.

Long-Term Policy Needs:

- Promote SBA and other programs that foster peer-to-peer mentoring and encourage expanded procurement opportunities for very small businesses, particularly those owned and run by women and entrepreneurs of color.
- Increase liquidity for microloan intermediaries that provide technical assistance support to underserved businesses.

Expand access to responsible credit and capital

We urge federal and state officials to identify creative ways to enable responsible access to credit to ensure small businesses are better positioned to access financing when they need it most. While small businesses may be wary to take on new debt in this economic climate, we must ensure they are able to access the right kind of capital in an efficient manner, and that women, people of color, immigrants and rural entrepreneurs have equal access to financing.

Immediate Policy Needs:

- Expand the CDFI Fund to \$1 billion to ensure an infusion of loan dollars that CDFIs can start disbursing into their communities now.
- Establish special purpose vehicles or other facilities within the Federal Reserve to allow CDFIs, MDIs and other mission-driven lenders to sell loans on the secondary market, enabling increased liquidity.

- Require the SBA to increase awareness about the Small Business Debt Relief Program.
- Extend Truth in Lending Act disclosure requirements to small business credit products so that small businesses struggling with cash flow are not taken advantage of during this pandemic. Such legislation would ensure more transparency and fairness in small business lending products, as we've recommended in the Small Business Borrowers' Bill of Rights.⁵
- Prohibit "confession of judgment" clauses in small business lending agreements whereby borrowers agree in advance to waive their right to contest any dispute with a lender, often costing them their entire savings.

Long-Term Policy Needs:

- Reauthorize and fund a program similar to the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) at \$10 billion. Between 2010 and 2017 SSBCI facilitated the delivery of \$9.5 billion in flexible, affordable debt and equity capital via the states to small businesses across the country.
- Establish and financially backstop new types of loan products that provide initial repayment moratoria, a subsequent period of no- or low-interest and responsible interest levels after that.
- Make permanent the New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC), which has helped to attract more than \$60 billion in private sector funding to community development financing intermediaries that provide loans to businesses in economically-distressed communities across the United States.
- Increase funding and access to SBA's 7(a), Express Loan, Community Advantage, and Microloan programs, including additional technical assistance dollars and dedicated outreach campaigns.
- Promote innovative, responsible equity products such as crowdfunding and other patient capital instruments.

Additional financial measures and resources

Immediate Policy Needs:

- If the direct grant programs or the improvements to the PPP recommended above are not enacted, establish a program that would pay employers to maintain healthcare for employees they had to lay off or furlough. And, whether or not such new policies are enacted, allow furloughed employees to stay on their business-sponsored health plans during the COVID-19 emergency.
- Ensure the small business tax provisions of the CARES Act can be taken in conjunction with any grant/loan assistance like the PPP.
- Adjust repayment due dates on property taxes and commercial rent to give small businesses the flexibility they need to stay afloat.
- Pass legislation that would ensure business insurance companies cover COVID-19 revenue losses.
- Provide forbearance on all small business loans and credit card payments for at least six months. The CARES Act provided relief for SBA loans, but we must ensure that small businesses with other forms of debt are supported, as SBA lending is only a fraction of the market.
- Ensure all SBA loans and/or grants awarded to small businesses are efficient and immediate so that small businesses are not receiving loans months after an application is submitted.
- Guarantee that all small business financing products are unrestricted so small businesses are able to use emergency loans to provide employee benefits, pay wages, pay taxes, make telework arrangements, pay rent, refinance existing debt, and more.

⁵ www.borrowersbillofrights.org

- Enact measures that would immediately provide funding for small businesses to acquire personal protective equipment, plexiglass and other supplies that help prevent the spread of viruses. This will instill customer confidence, enabling businesses to reopen more quickly and sustainably.

Long-Term Policy Needs:

- Pass a moratorium on increasing future unemployment insurance rates so that small businesses do not have to pay higher premiums in subsequent years as a result of COVID-19 layoffs.
- Create a student debt relief program for entrepreneurs. This would benefit many aspiring entrepreneurs, especially millennials, who wish to start businesses that could create new jobs and inject money into our nation's economy.
- Support federal and state efforts to ensure that entrepreneurs can benefit from an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program. Expansion of the EITC can have a powerful effect on economic security for entrepreneurs and independent workers.

Strengthen and expand the Affordable Care Act

Small businesses and their employees need access to affordable, quality healthcare, now more than ever. Unfortunately, the Administration's efforts to rollback key ACA provisions have weakened access to affordable care. Much more needs to be done to expand coverage, strengthen the marketplace and rein in costs so that if COVID-19 continues to threaten the health of our communities, small businesses and workers won't face increasing premiums and lackluster coverage.

Immediate Policy Needs:

- Guarantee continued health protections for individuals with pre-existing conditions.
- Block the extension of short-term, limited duration insurance plans. These plans are intended to fill gaps in an individual's coverage in the event of job loss or other life changes, but are not required to cover essential health benefits and can come with hefty deductibles.
- Oppose efforts to implement association health plans (AHPs). For example, even though COVID-19 testing has been designated as an essential health benefit, treatment costs and other tests may not be covered under these plans as they're not required to cover all essential health benefits. AHPs also encourage younger, healthier groups to purchase inadequate coverage, thus increasing costs for the rest of the small group market.
- Protect consumers from surprise billing by limiting patient cost-sharing to the amount they would owe to an in-network provider, setting a payment standard regarding what insurers owe providers in these situations and prohibiting providers from balance billing patients.

Long-Term Policy Needs:

- Close the coverage gap by continuing to expand Medicaid in states that haven't done so, which is vitally important for low-income entrepreneurs and small business workers who can't afford coverage. Roughly 616,000 small business employees could gain coverage if all remaining states expanded Medicaid.
- Reinstate the ACA's risk corridor program to help protect against carriers overpricing or underpricing their products to keep premiums low and insurance markets sustainable. This is particularly important to prevent insurers, who are likely to see huge profits in 2020, from overpricing products in 2021 because of uncertainty related to COVID-19.
- Expand the current system of marketplace subsidies that has helped make healthcare more affordable for many small businesses, their employees and self-employed Americans.

- Pass legislation to rein in the rapidly rising costs of prescription drugs, as these costs are hurting small business owners' bottom lines.

Paid family and medical leave and additional benefits

Nearly half of all U.S. workers are employed by small businesses, which means small businesses are particularly impacted by loss of employees due to illness. The following actions can help small businesses retain their employees while decreasing the spread of COVID-19.

Immediate Policy Needs:

- Ensure small businesses that offer paid family medical and sick leave during COVID-19 receive cash reimbursement, instead of having to wait for a quarterly tax reduction or an annual tax credit as provided in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA.)
- Enact a temporary sick leave policy to help cover employees who need to take sick time, but this must be coupled with immediate grant funding to help small employers cover the costs of leave.

Long-Term Policy Needs:

- Pass the FAMILY Act to establish a national program that would provide partial wage replacement for small business employees and the self-employed to deal with health conditions for themselves and family members or to take parental leave. This program would be funded by modest employee and employer payroll contributions.
- In lieu of a federal paid leave program, pass more state laws to establish paid family and medical leave insurance programs.
- Implement policies at the national and state levels that would help more working parents afford child care, understanding this is essential to retaining a skilled workforce. With schools closed around the country due to COVID-19, lack of access to affordable childcare has been a challenge for both entrepreneurs and small business employees as they struggle to balance work and home needs at the same time.
- Support state and federal efforts to establish publicly-administered retirement savings programs ("Secure Choice") programs, as has been enacted in several states, to help more small businesses, their employees and the self-employed establish retirement plans.

Fair and Open Markets

COVID-19 has led to so much uncertainty producing and delivering products and services, encouraging even more inequitable business practices than already existed before the crisis. Federal and state officials should leverage their power to ensure our markets are fair and open and ensure small businesses are able to operate on a level playing field. Small businesses cannot thrive when larger entities are competing unfairly.

Immediate and Long-Term Policy Needs:

- Enforce existing laws preventing price-gouging.
- Enforce federal and state antitrust laws.

Conclusion

As our economy starts to reopen, small businesses need additional government support to ensure they can run their businesses and continue to be the backbone of America's economy. By implementing these recommended policies, we can build a small business economy that doesn't just survive this crisis, but one that is even stronger and better protected from the next disaster.



March 19, 2020

Chairman Richard Shelby
U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20510

Chairman Nita Lowey
U.S. House Committee on
Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senate Committee on
Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Kay Granger
U.S. House Committee on
Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Lowey and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger,

On behalf of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), our members and volunteers, we respectfully urge that Congress consider the needs of rural communities that are going to be hit hard by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these communities are in the early stages of building small businesses focused on serving the outdoor recreation community. Many Trail-related businesses will not survive the impact of travel restrictions and attempts to limit the spread of COVID-19. Economic stimulus legislation under development now in Congress needs to generate the necessary income and workforce development for rural communities to recover quickly.

For perspective, the Bureau of Economic Analysis released a report last year that states outdoor recreation accounts for 2.2% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product, supports 5.2 million American jobs, and contributes, nationally, \$778 billion in economic output. ATC fears that without stimulus funds, we will see many of these operations close with great impact to rural communities. Outdoor recreation is rural economic development.

The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) is the longest hiking-only footpath in the world, measuring roughly 2,193 miles in length. The Trail travels through 14 states (and 88 counties) along the crests and valleys of the Appalachian Mountain Range, from its southern terminus at Springer Mountain, Georgia, to the northern terminus at Katahdin, Maine. This region of the U.S. is rich in scenic, cultural, and historic resources, and offers habitat for numerous unique species. The Trail traverses six other units of the National Park System, eight National Forests, and 74 parcels of state forest, park, and

game land, enabling these communities to link to a national network as they utilize public lands as economic engines.

ATC's first and foremost responsibility is to ensure the proper management and maintenance of the A.T. and access to some of the most significant recreation lands in the eastern United States. This is possible only through a cooperative management system involving 31 maintaining clubs, 6,000 volunteers, and federal and state land management agencies. National Park Service (NPS) and United States Forest Service (USFS) infrastructure, such as shelters, roads, connector trails, and bridges are essential access points for the Trail.

Currently, the deferred maintenance needs of our nation's public lands are immense—more than \$20 billion when the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Indian Education are included. The most recent, and outdated, estimates show the A.T. claims more than \$20 million of the total federal lands backlog to address infrastructure needs. This includes funding for maintaining the Trail itself, roads, parking areas, bridges, water systems, and structures like trail shelters. This estimate does not include the total needs of the units the Trail intersects, such as Great Smoky National Park, the most-visited National Park in the nation. ATC, like many National Trails non-profit partners, works closely with several Service Corps and employs crews that are well-positioned to address the shovel-ready deferred maintenance projects. These organizations hire numerous staff from local communities that work to enhance the outdoor recreation resources their communities rely on to draw in tourism dollars.

The needs of rural gateway communities are not unlike the needs of communities without direct access to public lands. However, the ability of gateway communities to draw people to local, state, and federal public land units provides an incredible opportunity to get people out and working again as well as attract those who, for safety's sake, had to stay away. Many communities along National Trails also serve as vital partners to provide public land interpretation and education and have invested in infrastructure aimed at reaching diverse visitors to their regions.

As Congress formulates additional stimulus legislation, we urge it to address impacts to rural, outdoor-related business by:

- Making funding available to hire staff members and local contractors who will address deferred maintenance-related assets on public lands;
- Making funding available for outdoor recreation/conservation stewardship-related capital construction in public land gateway communities, including visitor centers, roads, and bridges;
- Supporting the certification and training for those engaging in conservation stewardship career development via public land agencies and their management partners;
- Promoting the recovery of place-based tourism, particularly related to outdoor recreation;

Outdoor recreation is rural economic development. Providing for the proper care and stewardship of our conserved lands and resources is essential to securing the long-term viability of the communities along National Trails. Responding to the current pandemic and resulting economic crisis will require the federal, state, and local governments to think outside of the box and pull as many levers as possible to get Americans working again and to revive our dynamic outdoor recreation and rural economies.

If you have any questions, please contact ATC's Director of Federal Policy and Legislation, Brendan Mysliwiec, at bmysliwiec@appalachiantrail.org or 207-370-0450. Thank you.

Signed,



Sandra Marra
President and CEO
Appalachian Trail Conservancy

CC: U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi
Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt
Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue
U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Ranking Member Joe Manchin, III
ANST U.S. Senate Delegation
U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
U.S. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman Raúl Grijalva
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources Ranking Member Rob Bishop
U.S. House ANST Caucus
Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Vicki Christiansen
Deputy Director of the National Park Service Vela

RIVER RUNNERS FOR WILDERNESS

A PROJECT OF LIVING RIVERS

Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

July 23, 2020

Full Committee Hearing to Examine the Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic
on Users of Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks

Statement for the Record

Submitted by Tom Martin, Council Member, River Runners For Wilderness

To the Honorable Chairman Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member Joe Manchin, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tom Martin and I volunteer for River Runners For Wilderness on behalf of do-it-yourself (non-commercial) river runners on Western rivers. River Runners For Wilderness was founded in 2002 as a project of the non-profit Living Rivers and represents a broad spectrum of river runners and American citizens who care about the river resources in the Colorado River watershed. With over two thousand members we have a deep concern for the future of the recreational and safety values of the Colorado River watershed and the management of these national treasures.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought great challenges to this country. Millions of people are unemployed and children are out of school. It makes sense that travel to federal lands is greatly increasing, both short distances close to home and long distances to National Parks, United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Reclamation areas. It also makes sense that these people are not using commercial tourism such as outfitting and guiding businesses services. It also makes sense that these businesses have seen 60% or more cancellations in bookings while federal land visitation by the general public has skyrocketed.

While many do-it-yourself federal lands visitors have a very rich knowledge base of the local flora, fauna, and a thorough understanding of federal land management, some do not. This trend toward increased do-it-yourself access to federal lands is a perfect time to launch an

educational campaign so that all citizens can become aware of simple but important things like gate etiquette to help ranchers and leave-no-trace camping activities to help promote healthy ecosystems.

This committee hearing allows us the chance to reflect that without congressional action, millions of Americans will not only be out of work but will be evicted as well. Many will look to federal lands as the only place available to attempt to wait for better economic times. With economic forecasts pointing to an explosion in homelessness, consideration should be given to the establishment of work programs such as a modernized Civilian Conservation Corps.

Given that do-it-yourself demand for access to federal lands has greatly increased, the economic boon do-it-yourself visitation brings to regional economies must be recognized. It also must be recognized that our federal lands can only accommodate so many visitors. Now is not the time to eliminate carrying capacity studies for commercial tourism permits, nor is it the time to allow unlimited increases in commercial tourism permits, such as is promoted in the SOAR and Recreation Not Red Tape legislative efforts. These legislative attempts will be devastating to the do-it-yourself visitors as agencies will have only one use group left to limit when over use of resources occur, the do-it-yourself visitors.

As we contemplate the serious impacts of COVID-19 on our National Parks, I would like to bring your attention to an actual case study where the above concerns are playing out in real-time. Grand Canyon National Park closed its access to Colorado River rafting trips on March 24, 2020, as the global COVID-19 pandemic raced across the United States. While much of the Park has reopened, a “phased reopening” of the Colorado River in the Park began on June 14, 2020.

This “phased reopening” was never explained to the boating public. It greatly increased river concessionaire trips and group sizes while doing little for the do-it-yourself public. In fact, since the closure in March, do-it-yourself river runners have been unable to apply for cancelled river permit openings, including small river trips with groups sizes of 8 people or less. The accommodations for the river concessionaires include enlarging group sizes on all concessionaire river trips from 32 to 38 people. Apart from COVID-19 issues with increasing group sizes, larger group sizes will increase attraction site congestion and campsite impacts.

This change in group sizes for the river concessionaires is a reversal of the 2006 Colorado River Management Plan which decreased concessionaire group sizes from 43 people to 32 people. The group size reduction was done at that time to better preserve park resources and decrease attraction site crowding.

Highly communicable diseases spread easily on river trips. Every year, Noro-type viruses have crippled river trips in Grand Canyon. While we appreciate that Grand Canyon National Park has just released information directed at do-it-yourself river runners to protect themselves while on non-commercial river trips, such information means nothing when unused river permit launches are not made available to the general do-it-yourself public.

Additional concessionaire "accommodations" include 45 new commercial launches each year, 15 in the spring and 30 in the fall, added to the approximately 600 river trips the concessionaires run each year. These additions are to remain in place for the next two and a half years.

The new launches and expanded group size will increase the concessionaire use to a maximum of 162,000 additional user days over the next two and a half years. During the 2020 closure at Grand Canyon National Park to keep river visitors safe, the river concessions lost a potential of 92,800 user days though actual losses were less as most of the cancelled concessions river trips were not fully booked.

Before this increase was announced, the river concessionaires annual use averaged about 107,000 user days a year. The new accommodations increase their user day potential by over 50%. The financial gain to this heavily subsidized oligopoly could easily be over \$30 million, except that just as commercial outfitters are seeing across the country, demand for concessionaire river trips in Grand Canyon dropped precipitously. Passengers who requested a rebooking to 2021 are being accommodated, and the empty seats they left this year are being actively re-booked by the concessionaires.

Do-it-yourself river runners did not fare nearly as well. The NPS accommodations for this group of Park visitors came in the form of new 8-person river trips, 15 in the month of March and 15 in October. This addition allows for a potential of 12,000 user days to offset an actual potential loss of 28,000 user days during the closure. No explanation is provided by the NPS to justify the overall loss of 16,000 user days, especially when compared to the increase for concessionaires of over 100,000 user days.

Grand Canyon National Park allowed do-it-yourself river trip permit holders with launch dates through August of 2020 the option to claim a same-date launch in 2022. Many permit holders opted to do this. Their unused launches were not released to the do-it-yourself public willing to raft Grand Canyon in groups of 16 or 8 people this summer. Those unavailable permits went unused, not by public choice, but by agency indifference.

The companies in Flagstaff that serve the do-it-yourself community by renting river gear, providing food packs, and river shuttles lost an estimated \$2 million during the closure, and even with the National Park Service accommodations, will not recover those losses. It goes without saying that do-it-yourself river runners fuel the local economy with retail purchases on their way to and from the river.

Demand for do-it-yourself river trips has increased every year since a lottery to distribute their permits was implemented in 2006. In February of 2020, almost 8,000 do-it-yourself lottery applicants tried their luck competing for roughly 480 coveted river trip permits. In the midst of this global pandemic, there is still high demand for this activity and yet the permits are not being released to the public who would use them.

One could assume increasing group sizes is a valid way to accommodate river runners, especially in light of the river concessions receiving a substantial group size increase from 32 to 38 people. That same accommodation was not offered to the family and friends oriented do-it-yourself river trips. Increasing do-it-yourself group sizes by just two people would increase the standard do-it-yourself river trip size from 16 people to 18 people, and the small river trip size from 8 people to 10 people. This simple change would have more than made up for the entire user day loss that occurred during the 2020 closure.

It is unclear how future pandemic trends may impact Colorado River trip bookings for both the commercial concessions and the non-commercial river trips. Managing a river by greatly increasing concessionaire access while not allowing the do-it-yourself public access to the Colorado River flies in the face of The Organic Act and best management practices intended to prevent impairment of park resources while keeping the visiting public safe from Covid-19.

Grand Canyon National Park deserves the best we can come up with, not a haphazard plan carried out with no formal approach or comment from the public. No other National Park Service

Unit, and no other river managed by any other Federal Agency, has done this type of “accommodation.”

This case study demonstrates that federal lands need to be managed to ensure that these precious federal resources are protected while being equitably enjoyed by the public who does not use commercial services. The unprecedented situation we find ourselves in with the coronavirus may call for assistance to help commercial tourism recover, but great care must be taken to ensure that the robust demand we are now seeing for do-it-yourself access to federal lands is not impeded unnecessarily.

Most cordially yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Martin".

Tom Martin, Council Member, River Runners For Wilderness

