



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE OUTDOORS ALLIANCE FOR KIDS (OAK)  
U.S. SENATE AND HOUSE COMMITTEES ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEES ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
REGARDING FISCAL YEAR 2017 APPROPRIATIONS

APRIL 18, 2016

Chairmen Murkowski and Calvert, Ranking Members Udall and McCollum, and Members of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee:

We, the undersigned members of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK), thank you for your past support of programs to connect children and youth with the outdoors, and we urge you to sustain funding for FY17 programs at the US Department of the Interior, Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Forest Service that increase engagement in the outdoors. We also urge you to maintain sufficient funding for agencies to adequately manage our public lands and waters.

OAK is a national strategic partnership of businesses and organizations representing more than 30 million individuals from diverse sectors of the economy with the common interest in expanding the number and quality of opportunities for children, youth, and families to connect with the outdoors. OAK supports public policies and investments that expand outdoor and environmental education opportunities, promote community health and wellness, and engage more youth in environmental stewardship.

We understand that we are in difficult fiscal times, but balancing the budget at the expense of programs and initiatives that ensure children and youth have opportunities to learn, get physically active, and increase their volunteerism in the outdoors will be a detriment to our nation. Environmental education provides critical tools for a 21st century workforce by giving students the skills to understand complex environmental systems and issues, and prepares students to compete globally and address environmental challenges and opportunities that impact our economy, health, and national security. Community health and wellness investments are critical for the local economy, as well. The prevention of chronic diseases can save lives, as well as promote the physical and mental well-being of all Americans.

Environmental stewardship programs provide young people with opportunities to spend more time outdoors while obtaining job skills at a time when youth unemployment rates are skyrocketing. In addition to contributing to our nation's robust outdoor recreation economy, youth national service and work programs help address the backlog of maintenance needs piling up on our public lands, address record youth unemployment, and prepare a diverse group of youth to be the next generation of natural resource stewards.

These areas are vital to the success of the U.S. in the global economy, and to our ability to create a 21st century workforce that is healthy, skilled, and prepared to be the next generation of leaders. The outdoor industry alone provides 6.1 million jobs and \$646 billion in direct consumer spending each year. Outdoor recreation, as enjoyed in national, state, and local parks and public lands, provides millions of America's children, youth, and families an opportunity to hike, bike, swim, paddle or simply connect with nature. The outdoor recreation economy generates \$39.9 billion in federal revenue and another \$39.7 billion in state and local revenue annually.

OAK supports funding and initiatives to increase outdoor and environmental education, promote community health and wellness, and provide young people with jobs, training, and service and volunteer opportunities that connect them to the outdoors and recreation. We urge the subcommittee to restore funding to allow land management agencies to adequately manage our public lands and waters and to provide robust funding for the following programs that get youth outdoors:

**Department of the Interior:** OAK supports the Department of the Interior's goal of building the next generation of conservation and community leaders by supporting efforts to get young people to play, learn, serve, and work outdoors. By September 30, 2017, the Department of the Interior hopes to get millions of kids outside engaged in environmental education and to have provided 100,000 work and training opportunities for young adults. To this end, we urge you to support the Administration's budget requests of \$102.5 million for youth programs across the Department of the Interior, a \$37.7 million increase from the FY16 enacted level. This includes:

- \$38,200,000 for the National Park Service
- \$26,300,000 for the U.S. Geological Survey
- \$19,000,000 for the Fish and Wildlife Service
- \$13,500,000 for the Bureau of Indian Affairs
- \$1,000,000 for the Bureau of Land Management
- \$3,500,000 for the Bureau of Reclamation
- \$1,000,000 for the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement

Of the \$38.2 million for NPS, \$20 million is included for the Every Kid in a Park initiative. The funding would support transportation to bring more than one million students from Title I schools in urban areas to nearby national parks, and support park level youth engagement coordinators that would ensure park units have programming tailored for young people and their families, especially at high visitation and urban parks. OAK strongly supports this initiative, which will also provide every fourth grader in America and their families with free entrance to National Parks in the 2015-2016 school year. We urge you to support funding within the National Park Service for transportation grants and for dedicated youth coordinators to welcome fourth graders and their families to our National Parks and public lands.

Another key component of the Department's youth efforts will be partnering with Service & Conservation Corps (Corps) and other youth organizations through the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) initiative. The opportunities provided by 21CSC allow youth and veterans to become stewards of America's great outdoors through conservation service, help them obtain important job skills and credentials at a time when youth unemployment is high and young people are missing out on critical job

experiences, and improve public health by helping young people develop and maintain active lifestyles. We also urge you to sustain funding for the operational, management, and construction-related accounts of the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service, all of which could fund cost-effective public-private partnerships with Corps.

In addition, we urge support of the National Park Service Centennial Initiative, including \$35 million requested for the Centennial Challenge, to support thousands of veterans, youth, and others to work to upgrade the park system for its 100th anniversary in 2016. The Centennial Challenge is an economically wise program that leverages private dollars to match federal funds, with at least one private dollar for each federal dollar, to support projects to improve the visiting experience to our national parks. It is a proven effective program initially launched during the George W. Bush Administration, when it leveraged nearly \$50 million in donations after an initial federal investment of \$40 million. The \$35 million requested for the Centennial Challenge will reinvest in that initiative, and will be instrumental in garnering partner support to prepare park sites across the country for the centennial and the second century of NPS.

OAK also supports permanent reauthorization and full and dedicated funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The federal land acquisition program and the state and local assistance programs supported by LWCF over the years have created countless opportunities for youth and families to enjoy the outdoors, both in their communities and on federal public lands. LWCF also supports the new Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program which will create new opportunities for outdoor play as well as development or enhancement of outdoor recreation partnerships in our larger urban communities.

**Environmental Protection Agency:** OAK urges the subcommittee to fund the National Environmental Education Act (NEEA) programs at the Environmental Protection Agency at \$11.1 million. This program implements highly successful, nationwide environmental education programs. These programs support life-long environmental education and stewardship through several highly-leveraged, but under-resourced programs, including the National Environmental Education Training Program to provide professional development for teachers, the National Environmental Education Foundation to leverage public/private partnerships, and an environmental education grant program to support local environmental education providers.

OAK also supports the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, a fourteen agency collaboration spearheaded by the Environmental Protection Agency, to restore and connect youth with their waterways in nineteen pilot urban locations. While the EPA has not placed a line item in its budget for the UWFP, we commend the EPA for utilizing scarce resources to support this important effort to ensure children, youth and families in urban areas have close to home opportunities to experience nature.

**U.S. Forest Service:** OAK supports the U.S. Forest Service efforts to engage youth with their natural surroundings, whether that be in urbanized or rural areas. The U.S. Forest Service's multiple conservation education initiatives and outreach activities are integrated throughout the agency. In addition to this outreach, it is also important that children have access to nature nearby. Therefore, OAK supports the

following funding levels for two programs within the U.S. Forest Service that ensure children have access to nature:

- \$5,000,000 for the Community Forest and Open Space Program (CFP)
- \$31,300,000 for the Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF)

CFP has made substantial progress in preserving forests by increasing opportunities for Americans to connect with forests in their own communities and fostering new public-private partnerships. CFP has supported 27 community forest projects in cities and towns across 15 states and territories. U&CF served more than 200 million people in over 7,700 communities across the U.S. through the development and maintenance of local urban forestry programs. Both of these programs ensure that children can experience forests and trees in their communities.

OAK also supports other programs within the Forest Service that provide opportunities for youth to connect with nature. Conservation Education programs, Children's Grants programs including More Kids in the Woods and Children's Forests, and the USFS partnership with the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps are all important programs that help the next generation connect with and build an appreciation for the outdoors.

We thank you in advance for your support for these critical programs and look forward to working with you and your staff in the coming year. Should you have any questions about this letter, please have your staff contact Brenna Muller at [brenna.muller@sierraclub.org](mailto:brenna.muller@sierraclub.org) or (202) 548-4581.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the following members of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids:

Alliance for Childhood	National Interscholastic Cycling	REI
American Camp Association	Association	Sierra Club
American Forests	National Recreation and Park	SOS Outreach
American Hiking Society	Association	The Corps Network
Appalachian Trail Conservancy	National Wildlife Federation	The North Face
Children & Nature Network	NatureBridge	The Wilderness Society
Choose Outdoors	North American Association for	The Woods Project
Conservation Legacy	Environmental Education	TYO: Transforming Youth
Hipcamp	O'Neill Sea Odyssey	Outdoors
IslandWood	Outdoor Outreach	Washington Trails Association
Kids4Trees	Outdoors Empowered Network	Wilderness Inquiry
Latino Outdoors	Public Lands Service Coalition	YMCA of the USA
Montana Conservation Corps		