



May 11, 2017

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

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 fiscal year 2018 programs at the U.S. Department of the Interior, Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Forest Service that increase engagement in the outdoors. We also urge you to resist efforts to cut funding that would limit the ability of the federal government to adequately manage and protect our public lands, air, and water for future generations to enjoy.

OAK is a national strategic partnership of nearly 100 businesses and organizations representing more than 60 million Americans, with a common interest in connecting children, youth, and families 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.

The Outdoor Industry Association reports that outdoor recreation contributes \$887 billion annually to the U.S. economy while supporting more than seven million jobs covering every corner of the country. Actions taken now to create more opportunities for kids, youth, and families to be active in the outdoors will make an essential contribution to this growing economic sector by creating jobs and increasing recreation and tourism spending that supports the local, regional, and national economies, with the added benefits of improving children's health and creating the next generation of stewards and champions of our public lands.

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 develop valuable work and life skills in the outdoors will be a detriment to our nation. Specifically, we request that the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies continue to fund the following programs minimally ***at the final fiscal year 2017 amount in FY 2018:***

**U.S. Department of the Interior:** OAK supports the Department of the Interior's critical work to protect America's public lands, air and water, and ensure all children, youth and families have opportunities to experience the great outdoors, regardless of where they live. Last year, we celebrated the Centennial of the National Park Service with record visitation. We urge you to invest in our public land agencies to ensure they are

adequately managed, protected and capable of delivering high quality programming that allows young people from all walks of life to be physically active in the outdoors. Specifically, we request your support for the following critical programs:

- Youth in the Outdoors programming at \$64.8 million. Maintain funding for engaging youth in the outdoors across the department: Bureau of Land Management, \$1 million; Bureau of Reclamation, \$3.5 million; U.S. Geological Survey, \$23.7 million; Fish and Wildlife Service, \$13.5 million; National Park Service, \$18.2 million; Bureau of Indian Affairs, \$5 million. Engaging youth on their public lands will take a cross-departmental approach.
- Centennial Challenge at \$20 million. OAK supports this economically wise program that leverages private dollars with federal funds to improve visitor experiences including education programs and projects for youth. It is a proven effective program initially launched during the George W. Bush Administration. Previous investments have yielded more than twice funded amounts in private donations, and many more opportunities await with a funding boost.
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at a minimum of \$400 million. OAK continues to call for the permanent reauthorization and full and dedicated funding of LWCF and urges Congress to resist any efforts to divert funding from the Fund's intended purpose. LWCF is paid for with non-taxpayer dollars. More than 50 years ago, Congress made a commitment to the American public that a small portion of revenues from offshore drilling would go to natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation programs, as an offset for the depletion of the offshore oil and gas resources that belong to us all. 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.
- 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) Partnerships. Include language to support continued cost-effective partnerships between 21CSC and Department of Interior agencies through the Public Lands Corps program. 21CSC engages young Americans and returning veterans in service to strengthen our infrastructure and public lands, boost local economies, and multiply returns on our country's most valuable assets – it's unmatched landscapes and people. Corps accomplish millions of dollars of projects each year and engage thousands of other volunteers, at no additional cost to the federal government, to help address priority conservation, recreation, infrastructure, access and habitat projects in national parks, wildlife refuges and other lands and waters. 21CSC develops the next generation of outdoor stewards, recreationists, sportsmen and women, and resource managers. While gaining in-demand skills through service, Corps members build respect for our country, hard work, and the outdoors.

**Environmental Protection Agency:** OAK supports the Environmental Protection Agency's essential work of protecting human health and the environment - air, water, and land. The EPA also administers critical programs that ensure our children have access to healthy environments where they live and learn, and opportunities to learn in and about the environment. We urge you to maintain funding for the EPA to fulfill its mission and to continue administering the following low-cost, highly effective programs that have been recommended for elimination by the White House:

- National Environmental Education Act (NEEA) at \$8.7 million. Programs funded through NEEA have far-reaching and well-documented positive impacts. They enable citizens from all walks of life to make informed, scientifically sound environmental decisions regarding energy consumption, water quality and conservation. They provide practical applications for math, science, technology, and engineering. Outdoor and environmental learning increases academic performance across subject areas and is critical for ensuring America's children have the knowledge and experience to compete in the global economy.
- Environmental Justice Small Grants Program at \$6.7 million. Grants support and empower communities working on solutions to local and environmental and public health issues. The program provides critical support to community-based organizations and local and tribal organizations working with communities facing environmental justice issues.

**U.S. Forest Service:** OAK supports the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) efforts to engage youth with the natural world in rural and urban areas. USFS has multiple conservation education initiatives and outreach activities that ensure children, youth and families can access nature. We urge you to maintain funding for the following programs:

- Community Forest and Open Space (CFP) program at \$5 million, with an understanding that FY 2017 was funded at \$2 million. The CFP has supported 27 community forest projects in cities and towns across 15 states and territories through public-private partnerships, supporting nearby access to forests and trees for children, youth, and families.
- Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program at \$31.3 million, with an understanding that FY 2017 was funded at \$28.04 million. U&CF has served more than 200 million people in more than 7,700 communities across the U.S. through the development and maintenance of local urban forestry programs, increasing nearby nature access to forests and trees.
- 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) Partnerships. Include language to support continued cost-effective partnerships between 21CSC and the US Forest Service through the Public Lands Corps program. 21CSC engages young Americans and returning veterans in service to strengthen our infrastructure and public lands, boost local economies, and multiply returns on our country's most valuable assets – its unmatched landscapes and people. Corps accomplish millions of dollars of projects each year and engage thousands of other volunteers, at no additional cost to the federal government, to help address priority project on national forests, in particular wildfire remediation and response. Corps also provide important invasive species remediation and other projects key to forest health. 21CSC develops the next generation of wildfire fighters, outdoor stewards, recreationists, sportsmen and women, and resource managers. While gaining in-demand skills through service, Corps members build respect for our country, hard work, and the outdoors.
- Conservation Education programs. We ask for your support for several smaller and cost-effective programs throughout the Forest Service that provide children and youth with opportunities to learn in and about our forests. Conservation Education and grants programs, such as More Kids in the Woods and Children's Forest are all important programs that help the next generation connect with and build an appreciation for the outdoors.

OAK is working towards a future where all children, youth, and families have safe and readily available

opportunities to connect with the outdoors. Moving forward, OAK will continue to advance initiatives that get every child active, healthy, and outdoors by working closely with federal, congressional, state, and local partners. OAK is also committed to celebrating diversity, working towards equity, and practicing inclusion in all of our work.

We would be honored to meet with you at your convenience to discuss our recommendations. We look forward to working with you to further efforts to ensure all kids and families have the access, opportunities, skills and encouragement to experience our public lands and natural world. For questions about this request or to schedule a meeting please contact Jackie Ostfeld, chair of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids at 202-548-6584 or [jackie.ostfeld@sierraclub.org](mailto:jackie.ostfeld@sierraclub.org).

We thank you for considering our request and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Childhood  
American Forests  
American Hiking Society  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
American YouthWorks  
Association for Experiential Education  
Avid4 Adventure  
Big City Mountaineers  
Boys & Girls Clubs of America  
California Outdoor Engagement Coalition  
Children & Nature Network  
Conservation Legacy  
Discover Outdoors  
GirlTrek Inc.  
Great Basin Institute  
Hipcamp  
IslandWood  
Kids4Trees  
Latino Outdoors

Montana Conservation Corps  
National Interscholastic Cycling Association  
National Park Trust  
National Recreation and Park Association  
NatureBridge  
O'Neill Sea Odyssey  
Outdoor Outreach  
Outdoors Empowered Network  
Rocky Mountain Youth Corps  
Safe Routes to School National Partnership  
Sierra Club  
SOS Outreach  
Student Conservation Association  
The Corps Network  
The North Face  
The Trust for Public Land  
The Wilderness Society  
Transforming Youth Outdoors  
YMCA of the USA

***CC: Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations***