

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

March 18, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Vice Chairwoman
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chairman
The Honorable Tom Udall, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen, Vice Chairwoman, and Ranking Member:

We are writing to express our strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Forest Legacy Program, and to thank you for the strong commitment you made to these programs in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Omnibus Appropriations bill. As you begin the process of drafting the FY 2017 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you continue this commitment to ensure access to the outdoors for all Americans.

Over its 50 year history, the LWCF and the Forest Legacy Program have contributed to more than 40,000 state and local outdoor recreation projects, and have protected more than 2.5 million acres of land. From protecting wildlife habitat, natural resource lands, outdoor recreation opportunities, and working forests at the local, state and federal levels, to expanding hunting and fishing access, the LWCF and Forest Legacy conserve important lands for current and future generations. Continued investments in these programs help our nation's outdoor recreation, conservation and preservation economy, which supports millions of American jobs and contributes billions of dollars annually to the entire U.S. economy.

For nearly 40 years, the LWCF receipts have been collected annually to fund federal land acquisition, conserve threatened and endangered species, and provide critical grants to states. The LWCF was designed specifically to not use taxpayer dollars, and the LWCF receipts are not revenues for general purposes, but rather payments to the government specifically intended for conservation spending. However, more than \$18 billion has been siphoned from the LWCF trust fund since the program's inception in 1965, diverted from their original conservation purpose. This chronic redirection of funding has created a large backlog of conservation needs across the country, including already-negotiated land acquisitions from willing sellers. The resulting uncertainty has led states and federal land management agencies to postpone or cancel many important projects.

Despite a history of underfunding, the LWCF remains the premier federal program to conserve our nation's land, water, historic and recreational heritage. The programs funded by the LWCF, including Forest Legacy, the state-side program, endangered species grants, and battlefield

protection, provide a diverse array of conservation tools to address national, state, local and regionally driven priorities across the country. These include working lands easements that allow farmers and ranchers to continue acting as stewards of the landscape that sustains their livelihoods. Moreover, Forest Legacy supports working forest projects that help keep critical timberlands forested and accessible, and provides jobs in rural communities.

The LWCF is also a critical tool to acquire inholdings, expand public lands and protect national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, wild and scenic river corridors, national scenic and historic trails, Bureau of Land Management lands and other federal areas. The companion LWCF state grants program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. The LWCF stateside program has funded over 42,000 projects including outdoor recreation facilities, sports fields, and trails in all fifty states. The LWCF state grant is the government's primary investment tool for ensuring that children and families have access to close-to-home recreation and the demand continues to surpass the available funding. Access to local parks and community green spaces is vital for connecting youth and their families across the country with the outdoors.

These LWCF and Forest Legacy expenditures also create important long-term savings for our federal agencies and the public because they secure land that provides valuable water resources, guard against incompatible development, support private working lands, and reduce fire risk. We hope you will remember that both the LWCF and Forest Legacy leverage and complement state, local, and private conservation investments.

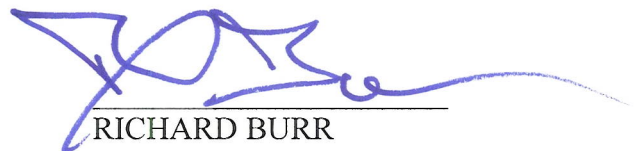
We look forward to working with the Subcommittee in the coming months to ensure that these vital programs are adequately funded in FY 2017 to support our longstanding commitment to conservation and to ensure that critical park protection and recreational development opportunities across the nation exist for generations to come. As you begin drafting the FY 2017 Interior Appropriations bill, please retain the important commitment you made to conservation in FY16 by continuing the strong funding level for both the LWCF and Forest Legacy.

We are grateful for your leadership in ensuring that funds necessary for our conservation and recreation needs across the country will continue to be available at a consistent level for the LWCF and the Forest Legacy Program.


Sincerely,

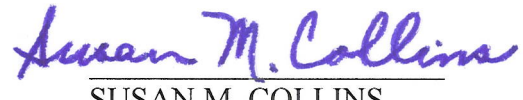


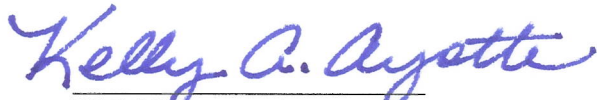
PATRICK LEAHY
U.S. Senator

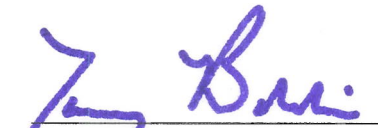


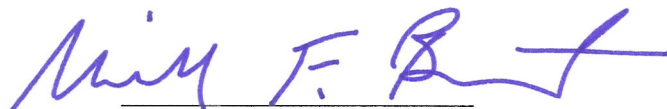
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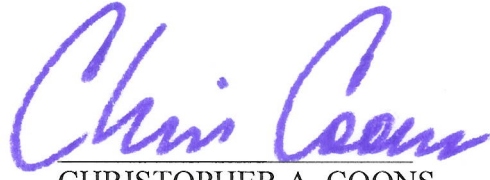

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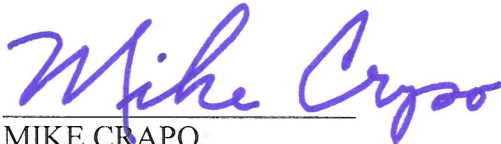

THOMAS R. CARPER
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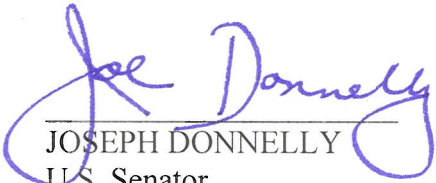
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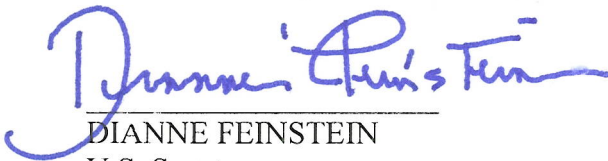
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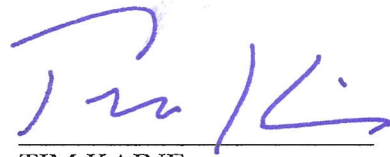
MARTIN HEINRICH
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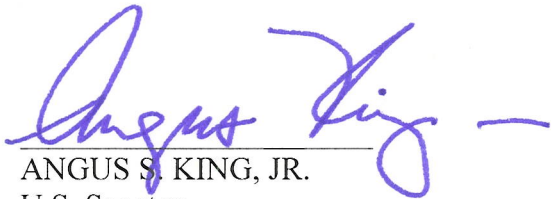
MAZIE K. HIRONO
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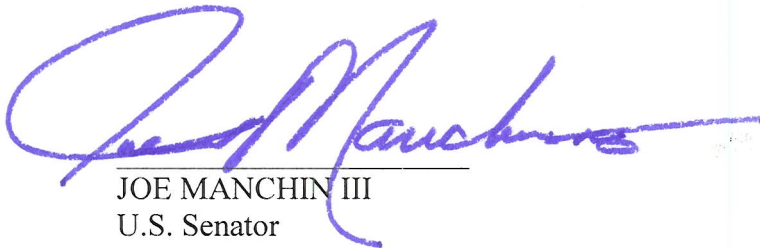
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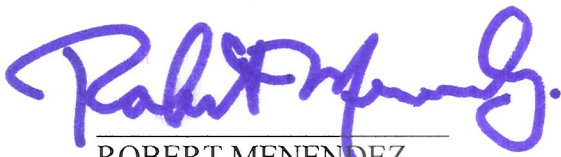
AMY KLOBUCHAR
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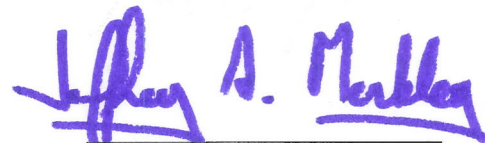
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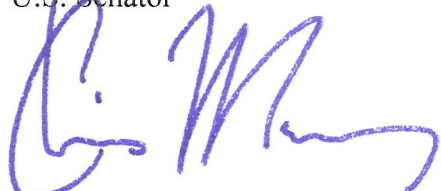
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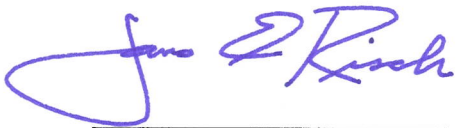
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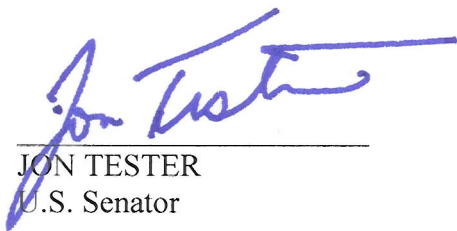
BERNARD SANDERS
U.S. Senator



BRIAN SCHATZ
U.S. Senator



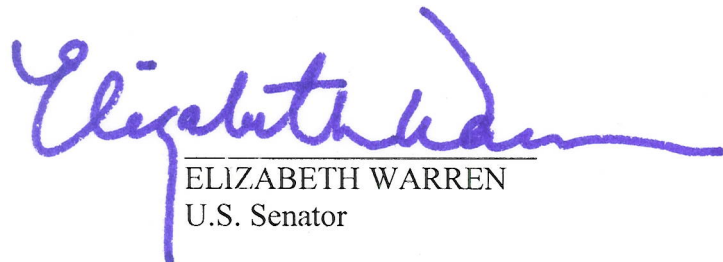
DEBBIE STABENOW
U.S. Senator



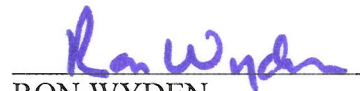
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