

June 8, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker of the House Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) strongly supports S. 3422 and H.R. 7092, the Great American Outdoors Act, and urges quick passage of this legislation in both Chambers of Congress. Our nation's public parks are one of our most treasured assets and this bipartisan bill helps ensure their longevity for generations to come. The legislation would establish a federal fund to reduce the \$12 billion National Park Service (NPS) deferred maintenance infrastructure backlog - and the additional \$8 billion deferred maintenance backlog on other public lands - by collecting up to 50 percent of unobligated, existing revenues the government collects in royalties from onshore, offshore, and renewable energy operations. It would also permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at its \$900 million per year authorization level.

Americans are visiting our nation's national parks at record numbers. In 2019 alone there were 327 million recreation visits, and visitors in 2018 spent \$20.2 billion, ultimately resulting in a \$40.1 billion benefit to the nation's economy and supporting 329,000 jobs nationwide. Despite the growing popularity of national parks, funding for our nation's public parks infrastructure is woefully inadequate. The NPS' nearly \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog includes \$6 billion for roads, bridges, tunnels, and parking lots and \$6 billion for non-transportation related projects such as eroding trails, visitor facilities, and water and electrical systems. In fact, the NPS manages more than 75,000 constructed assets, and over 41,000 of them - more than half - are in need of repair. It comes as no surprise, then, that ASCE's *2017 Infrastructure Report Card* gave our nation's public parks a grade of "D+."

Meanwhile, the LWCF provides a critical source of funding for the protection of natural resources and for outdoor recreation projects, including local parks, playgrounds, urban wildlife refuges, greenways, trails, and open spaces. In fact, more than 98% of our nation's

counties have a park project that has been funded by the LWCF. Since its inception in 1965, the LWCF has provided state and local governments with over 42,000 matching grants totaling over \$4 billion and leveraging much more in local and private investment. Funded through revenues generated through offshore oil and gas energy development, the LWCF comes at no cost to the taxpayer and generates \$4 in economic value for every dollar invested. A recent poll found that an overwhelming majority – 82% – of voters supporting the LWCF.

Passage of the Great American Outdoors Act will also assist in our nation's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is estimated that fully addressing the NPS deferred maintenance backlog would create or support over 100,000 jobs.

Our national parks remain a bedrock of American society and are strong economic drivers. As President Theodore Roosevelt said, "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value."

The Great American Outdoors Act is a critical investment measure that will help raise our nation's public parks "D+" grade and re-establish our nation's world-class infrastructure. ASCE urges passage of this legislation and stand ready to assist and support you in this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K.N. Gunalan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

K.N. Gunalan, Ph.D., P.E., D.GE, F.ASCE
ASCE President 2020

cc: Sen. Cory Gardner, Sen. Joe Manchin, Sen. Steve Daines, Sen. Rob Portman, Sen. Mark Warner, Sen. Angus King, Sen. Lamar Alexander, Sen. Richard Burr

Rep. Joe Cunningham, Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, Rep. Mikie Sherrill, Rep. Mike Simpson, Rep. TJ Cox, Rep. John Katko, Rep. Xochitl Torres Small, Rep. Lee Zeldin, Rep. Kendra Horn, Rep. Steve Stivers, Rep. Jared Golden, Rep. Jeff Fortenberry