

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2017

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

We are writing to express our strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Forest Legacy Program. As you begin the process of drafting the Fiscal Year 2018 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you allocate at least enacted level funding to this program to honor and continue the commitment to outdoor access for all Americans.

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. 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 2018 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.

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,



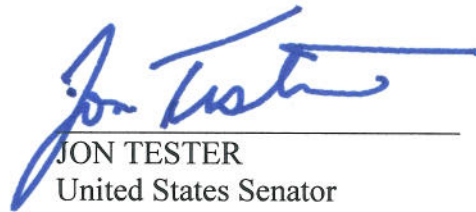
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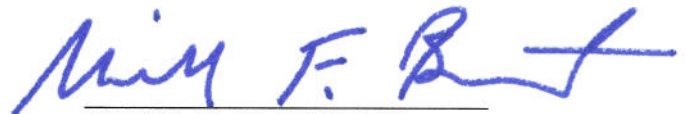
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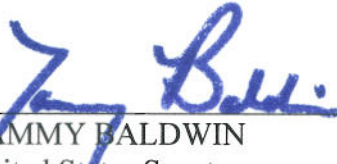
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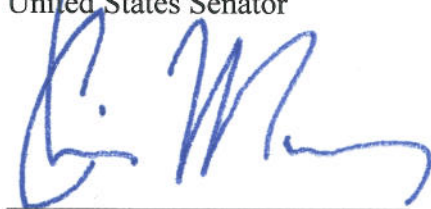
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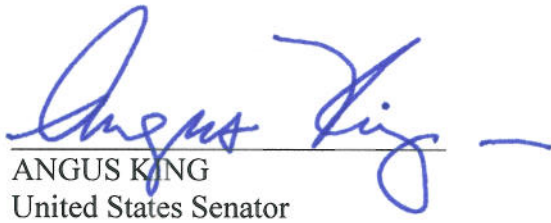
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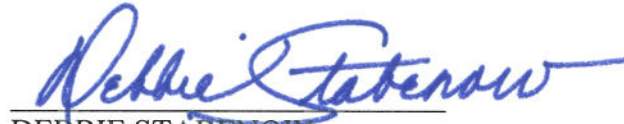
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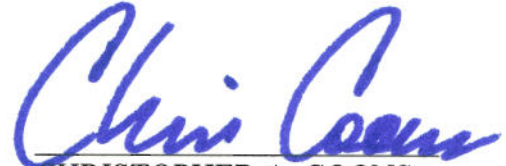


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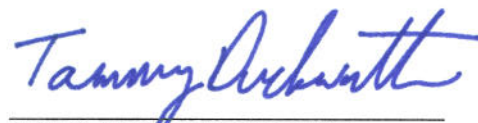

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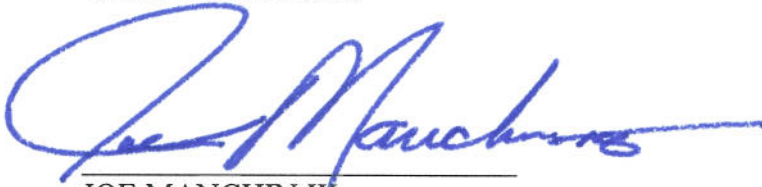
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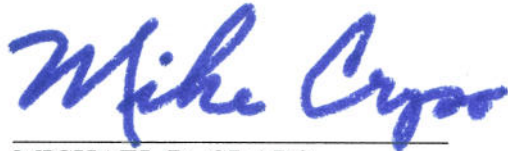
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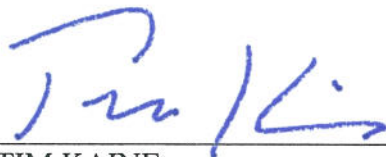
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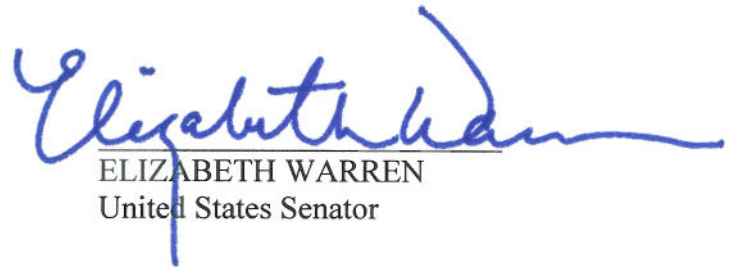
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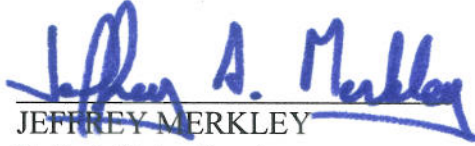
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cc: Chairman Thad Cochran
Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy