

United States Senate

August 11, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
USDA
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable David L. Bernhardt
Secretary
United States Department of Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Perdue and Secretary Bernhardt:

I am writing in light of passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, and to ask for your help in immediately implementing this historic law. Now, more than ever, people need access to their public lands, and this funding can help ensure people can hike, bike, hunt, fish, camp, and float safely. I respectfully urge you to begin preparing for the next fiscal year as soon as possible to get construction, access, and easement projects ready.

Mandatory funding guaranteed in this law will essentially double available annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, meaning that even more projects to assist states with local parks and trails are on the table. More ranchers can work with you to secure conservation and access easements on their properties. More checker boarded lands can be consolidated, lowering management costs and opening up trails and other routes for public access. I encourage you to work aggressively with communities and stakeholder groups to find a full slate of projects to put Fiscal Year 2021's \$900 million to good use. This is your chance to make up for years of lost time and low funding levels.

In addition to the Land and Water Conservation Fund projects, you also have an opportunity to begin planning a broad suite of construction projects to address deferred maintenance across the lands you oversee. These projects can provide a vital shot in the arm to local economies, while also improving access and visitor experiences. From rehabilitating campgrounds, to maintaining roads, to bringing visitor centers back up to snuff, the mandatory funding in this bill is an excellent first step towards deferred maintenance on our public lands. To the extent possible, stateside grant money should be made available as early as possible to assist local communities with projects before the end of the construction season. Communities across the country benefit from these investments in public infrastructure and there is no reason to delay investment in breathtaking landscapes such as Glacier National Park or Yellowstone National Park.

The Great American Outdoors Act invests heavily in our public lands, which lay at the heart of Montana's \$7.1 billion outdoor recreation economy. While Congress works to continue to support the small businesses and workers in the outdoor recreation economy, we also need to look long-term to protect access to the landscapes they work on.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I stand ready to work with you to make sure rubber hits the road as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jon Tester