



NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

National Advocacy Center
1200 G Street NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005
202-797-6800
www.nwf.org

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Dear Senator,

On behalf of the National Wildlife Federation and our more than six million members, thank you for holding a hearing on the Restore Our Parks Act, S. 3172. This important legislation will rectify the long-term funding deficiency of maintaining the recreational amenities and other infrastructure necessary to accommodate the more than 331 million annual visitors to America's National Parks.

America's National Parks and wildlife are inextricably linked—and we are confident Congress can address the significant challenges facing both.

We urge the Committee to think of the Restore Our Parks Act as one leg of a three-legged stool that provides the foundation for conservation in America:

1. **Wildlife habitat restoration (e.g. Recovering America's Wildlife Act);**
2. **Land conservation (e.g. Land and Water Conservation Fund); and**
3. **Maintenance of recreational infrastructure (e.g. Restore Our Parks Act).**

Recovering America's Wildlife Act: Right now, more than one-third of all wildlife species are at-risk and in need of proactive conservation action (more than 12,000 species). The best way to save species is through collaborative, proactive, on-the-ground habitat restoration work, before species become endangered and require more restrictive and often expensive regulatory protections under the Endangered Species Act. Like the Restore Our Parks Act, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act proposes to dedicate a portion of existing energy and mineral fees from federal lands and waters to fund implementation of existing State Wildlife Action Plans (already mandated by Congress) to save species of greatest conservation need. This collaborative, non-regulatory approach that will both save species and reduce regulatory uncertainty has attracted broad bipartisan support and the support of non-traditional partners from numerous industries and conservation organizations.

Land and Water Conservation Fund: The authorization of LWCF is scheduled to expire in September and there is overwhelming bipartisan support for permanently reauthorizing and dedicating full funding for this highly successful program. LWCF is the most effective land conservation program in the world. We encourage the Committee to prioritize its passage, including common-sense improvements championed by Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell.

Restore Our Parks Act: S. 3172 will provide essential resources to ensure the current and future generations of Americans can enjoy the unrivalled landscapes, wildlife, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities conserved through our National Parks. The National Wildlife Federation respectfully encourages the Committee to consider three improvements to S. 3172:

1. Explicitly require that projects minimize impacts (or enhance) wildlife habitat. We must ensure that the infrastructure improvements do not unwittingly diminish the diverse wildlife populations that are so important to the National Park experience and our natural heritage.
2. Allow a portion of Fund to be used for maintaining or enhancing recreational infrastructure at National Wildlife Refuges, Bureau of Land Management lands, and National Forests. These important public lands have fewer maintenance needs than NPS, but they have backlogs that should be addressed through the same funding mechanism as proposed in S. 3172. These sites collectively host more than 261 million visitors annually (National Wildlife Refuges: 47 million visitors/year; National Forests: 148 million visitors/year, Bureau of Land Management: 67 million visitors/year—all in addition to the 331 million visitors to NPS sites). Further, these lands host the vast majority of Americans who hunt and fish, given the prohibitions at many NPS sites.
3. Require that the Department prioritize investments that expand outdoor recreational opportunities of all types and for all of our diverse communities. America's rapidly growing outdoor economy generates nearly \$900 billion in economic activity and supports more than 7.5 million jobs. Ensuring that Americans of all backgrounds and interests have access to world-class camping, hiking, wildlife viewing, boating, floating, hunting, fishing, etc., will help attract new visitors to America's public lands.

We urge the Committee to make it a priority this year to enact all three of these critical conservation programs (LWCF, Recovering America's Wildlife Act, and Restore Our Parks) and fully fund them with dedicated revenues (e.g. on and offshore energy and mineral revenues). All three are predicated on the philosophy that if value is going to be extracted from our public lands and waters, a portion of the monetized value should be invested back into on-the-ground conservation that generates additional economic benefit and natural resource enhancement. By prioritizing passage of these three interrelated programs, this Committee will ensure that America's public lands and wildlife heritage endure for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations.

Thank you again for all this Committee continues to do for conservation. The National Wildlife Federation stands ready to help in any way.

Sincerely,



Collin O'Mara
President and CEO
National Wildlife Federation