

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

We, the undersigned organizations and members of the Forest Climate Working Group, are writing today to express our strong support for the Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422), which would provide full, dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The Great American Outdoors Act represents an unprecedented opportunity to advance important conservation priorities to enactment.

The Forest Climate Working Group (FCWG) is our country's only forest sector coalition that represents every aspect of U.S. forests from government agencies, landowners, forest products, outdoor recreation, conservation and wildlife groups, academics, and carbon finance experts. Together, we represent diverse and bipartisan stakeholders that are committed to advancing scientifically informed forest policy that incorporates forests, forest products and natural working lands solutions as a key part of climate change mitigation. Dedicated funding for the LWCF is an important plank in our policy platform as it plays a vital role in maintaining and expanding forest cover on private and public forests.

A significant outcome of providing full and dedicated funding to the LWCF would be the strengthening of the Forest Legacy Program (FLP). As this program's funding is derived from the LWCF, more reliable funding for the LWCF would mean more reliable funding for the FLP. This action by itself would be a noteworthy achievement worth celebrating.

The FLP supports timber sector jobs and sustainable forest operations while protecting air and water quality, wildlife habitat, access for recreation and other public benefits provided by forests. Conserving working forest lands contributes significantly to local and state economies, especially in rural areas. According to the National Alliance of Forest Owners, U.S. working forests support approximately 2.9 million jobs, \$128 billion in payroll, and \$336 billion in sales and manufacturing. Today, U.S. forests and forest products annually sequester and store almost 15% of U.S. carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels and new research suggests we could nearly double this natural carbon capture with the right actions. The FLP helps ensure working forests remain working forests in perpetuity and enables them to continue serving as a carbon sink for future generations.

Since its inception, this program has been incredibly successful, tremendously effective and overwhelmingly popular. However, on average more than half of the intended annual funding for the LWCF (which includes the FLP and nine other subprograms) has not been appropriated for its authorized conservation purposes – despite being specifically put aside from offshore oil and gas drilling royalties as a conservation offset. As a result, the Forest Legacy Program has been vastly oversubscribed and unable to meet the demand for participation. This bill would not only provide critically needed funding but also the certainty needed for landowners to make long-term financial decisions.

Congress recently recognized the importance of the Forest Legacy Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund when it permanently authorized the LWCF as part of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act. Permanently authorizing the program is an important

step but full, dedicated funding is necessary to provide our working forests across the country the support they need to ensure these lands continue to be productive for generations to come.

The Forest Legacy Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund also create important long-term savings for our federal agencies and the public because they secure land that provides valuable clean water resources, guard against incompatible development, support private working lands, and reduce fire risk. These programs leverage and complement state, local, and private conservation investments. The FLP has prevented the loss of almost two million acres of forestland in 42 states over the last 20 years and leveraged an equal amount of state, local, and private funding for every dollar spent.

The Forest Legacy Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund are critical infrastructure investments with strong bipartisan support. Across every state in our country, these community-driven conservation programs have helped ensure that all Americans, regardless of race, income, or gender, can enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of accessing our shared public lands, enhanced air and water quality, and protected wildlife.

We strongly urge you to advance the Great American Outdoors Act through the Senate and to enactment, and help guarantee our forests and public lands have the tools and funding to ensure they support future generations of Americans.

Sincerely,

- American Bird Conservancy
- American Forest Foundation
- American Forests
- Enviva
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Finite Carbon
- Forest Landowners Association
- Green Diamond Resource Company
- Hancock Natural Resource Group
- Hardwood Federation
- Land Trust Alliance
- National Alliance of Forest Owners
- National Association of Forest Service Retirees
- National Association of State Foresters
- National Wildlife Federation
- Molpus Woodlands Group
- Open Space Institute
- Port Blakely
- PotlatchDeltic
- REI Co-op
- RenewWest
- Society of American Foresters
- The Climate Trust
- The Conservation Fund

- The Forestland Group
- The Forest Stewards Guild
- The Lyme Timber Company
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Trust for Public Land
- The Westervelt Company
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
- Weyerhaeuser