

The Honorable Senator Patty Murray
U.S. Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

March 11, 2014

Subject: Fiscal Year 2015 Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Initiative Appropriation

Dear Senator Murray,

We are writing to thank you for your past support of the Forest Service's Legacy Roads and Trails program and express our strong support for continued funding in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill. Since its inception in FY 2008, the Legacy Roads and Trails program has allowed the Forest Service to make targeted progress in addressing problems associated with its aging and under-maintained road system. Rural communities have benefitted from the creation of living-wage jobs in neighboring forest lands. The work required to repair/upgrade critical roads needed for access, decommission unneeded ones and replace undersized culverts or fish passage barriers, also supports these jobs.

Legacy Roads and Trails is an example of a program that was created to focus on a very specific problem, yet the benefits are far reaching for water quality, salmon habitat, recreational access, and the economy. Since its inception in 2008, the program has received \$350 million dollars nationally, with National Forests in Washington receiving nearly \$22 million. While the FY14 Spending Bill cut Legacy Roads and Trails by 22%, we recognize that it took the support of you and many other members to retain the program and thank you for it. It is indeed tough economic times for everyone, yet we remain concerned that this level of funding - equating to approximately \$2 million a year for Washington forests - is inadequate to address the increasingly urgent needs associated with the Forest Service's overburdened road and trail system, and to maintain the level of success achieved in past years. We therefore urge you to at least restore Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails funding to a level of \$45 million in FY 2015.

Forest Service Road Facts: The Need for the Legacy Roads and Trails Program

The Forest Service road system was built decades ago - financed nearly 75% by appropriations - to support large-scale timber harvesting. Today, the road network continues to support forest management activities but also supports a strong recreation economy with at least 63% of Washingtonians participating in outdoor activities each year generating \$1.6 billion in local and state taxes¹. With road funding levels dropping to 18% of what they were in 1990, the Forest Service is overwhelmed by significant management and ecological problems related to this deteriorating infrastructure as described below:

- The road system is larger than can be effectively managed.
 - Nationally, the Forest Service is responsible for managing ~375,000 miles of roads, nearly 8 times more miles than the Interstate Highway System. In Washington State, there are ~22,000 miles of system roads, nearly 3 times more miles than the state highway system.
 - Region 6 (Oregon and Washington) contain a quarter of the nation's Forest Service road miles.

¹ Outdoor Industry Association. The Outdoor Recreation Economy FactSheet. 2012.

- Maintenance and management funds for the road system have become nearly non-existent.
 - The Forest Service only receives enough funding to maintain approximately 20% of its road system to standard on an annual basis.
 - In Region 6, since 2010, road maintenance funds have dropped 37% while the need increases every year.

National Forest's in Washington	Total Road Miles	Total Maintenance Need		
		Annual Road Maintenance Distribution (FY13)	Annual ² Maintenance Need	Deferred ³ Maintenance Need
Gifford Pinchot	4,103	\$939,000	\$5,312,486	\$53,330,891
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie	2,453	\$1,219,000	\$9,660,568	\$81,915,920
Olympic	2,026	\$702,000	\$4,467,995	\$42,680,614
Umatilla (in WA & OR)	4,624	\$358,000	\$6,647,168	\$65,211,612
Okanogan-Wenatchee	8,163	\$1,838,000	\$17,050,400	\$158,111,026
Colville	4,309	\$606,000	\$4,306,765	\$37,336,065
Columbia River Gorge (in WA & OR)	99	\$88,000	\$121,557	\$1,454,584
<i>Totals</i>	<i>25,777</i>	<i>\$5,750,000</i>	<i>\$47,566,939</i>	<i>\$440,040,712</i>

- At the current rate of Legacy Roads and Trails funding, it will take 220 years to address the deferred maintenance needs of all national forests in Washington State.
- Roads are the key factor in improving watershed health in forests.
 - A Watershed Condition assessment completed by the Forest Service showed that 78% of the watersheds in Washington national forests are negatively affected by roads⁴.
- Roads impact drinking water suppliers.
 - Under- or improperly-maintained roads chronically bleed sediment into rivers, increasing turbidity and increasing costs to filter water for public drinking water supplies.
 - Water from national forest lands in Washington supply nearly 86% of the state's population⁵.
- Roads impact fish and wildlife.
 - Poorly constructed road-stream crossings inhibit fish passage and excess sediment from under-maintained roads can bury critical salmon spawning gravels.

² U.S. Forest Service Region 6 data, 2013. These costs are derived from average National Unit Costs and include a burden rate of approximately 40% to cover planning, contracting, and all other overhead costs associated with returning the road system components to an original "like new" condition.

³ U.S. Forest Service Region 6 data, 2013.

⁴ U.S. Forest Service Watershed Condition Framework Assessment. May 2011.

⁵ U.S. Forest Service. Water and the Forest Service. January 2000.

- Roads cause significant wildlife habitat fragmentation that reduces connectivity.
- Undermaintained roads reduce access to recreational destinations.
 - Visitor use of the national forests has increased over the years, but when roads wash out in storms or rough surfaces make travel difficult, the public loses access to fishing, hiking, and camping destinations.
 - In Region 6, nearly 4 million people visit National Forests annually⁶.

Legacy Roads and Trails: Program Benefits and Demonstrated Success

The Legacy Roads and Trails program provides crucial funding to maintain and improve important roads while decommissioning those that are no longer needed. Shrinking the road system to a more manageable size over time reduces both its fiscal and environmental burden. It also enables the agency to keep a significantly higher portion of the road system maintained to standard allowing better and more reliable access. Key program benefits in Washington include (2008-2013):

- Created or maintained an average of 330 to 528 jobs annually - bringing dollars and jobs into rural communities that also rely on the forest for drinking water and recreation;
- Maintained and/or storm-proofed 1,780 miles of needed roads to increase their ability to stand-up during powerful storms and ensure safe access;
- Reclaimed 204 miles of unneeded roads to reconnect habitat and greatly reduce the delivery of sediment to streams;
- Restored fish passage at 32 stream crossings to provide fish and other aquatic species access to upstream (and downstream) habitat;
- Constructed or reconstructed 12 bridges to protect against imminent failure;
- Improved and maintained 104 miles of trails;
- Allowed the Forest Service to provide matching funds for partnerships (such as with salmon recovery groups), enabling dollars to stretch often 4 times the original amount; and
- Reduced the liability to America's taxpayers through permanent reductions in maintenance at a rate of \$3 million per year (nationally).

Forest Service hydrologists, fisheries biologists, recreation managers, engineers and others rely on the Legacy Roads and Trails program. Its popularity derives in part from the expanded capacity the program provides, but also that it is targeted to address a very specific problem enabling the agency to show obvious results, such as:

- Pre/post storm monitoring of Legacy Roads and Trails project sites in 6 states showed an 80% reduction of sediment at 9 decommissioned road sites, 67% reduction of sediment at 4 storm-proofed sites⁷.
- Post project monitoring of sites where fish passage barriers were removed in Oregon and Washington showed fish accessing previously unavailable habitat at nearly all studied sites⁸.

⁶ U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. Forest Service. National Visitor Use Monitoring Results. FY 2008 – 2013. Updated May 2013.

⁷ Nelson, Nathan, Tom Black, Charles Luce and Richard Cissel. 2012. Legacy Roads and Trails Monitoring Project Update 2012. USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

⁸ Robertson, Greg, Brian Bair and David Heller. 2011. Pacific Northwest Region Aquatic Organism Passage-Stream Simulation Effectiveness Monitoring Report. USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region and TEAMS Enterprise Unit. Portland Oregon.

- On the Siuslaw National Forest (OR), roads that were storm-proofed had fewer landslides than roads that did not receive maintenance when damage from two large storms was compared⁹.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program has demonstrated success resulting in cleaner water, local living-wage jobs, improved visitor access, restored fisheries, reduced flooding impacts (such as in the Skokomish watershed) and long-term taxpayer savings. The program has also played an important role in moving towards meeting federal salmon restoration goals. For these reasons, we urge your support for \$45 million in funding for this program in the FY15 Interior-Environment Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Mike Anderson, Senior Resource Analyst
The Wilderness Society

Thomas O'Keefe, Pacific NW Stewardship Director
American Whitewater

Karen Daubert, Executive Director
Washington Trails Association

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Greg Haller, Conservation Director
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Rebecca Wolfe, Co-Chair & Conservation Chair
Snohomish Group

Rick McGuire, President
Alpine Lakes Protection Society

Sierra Club, Washington State Chapter

⁹ Ellis-Sugai, Barbara. USDA Forest Service Memo. Impact of the January 2012 flood event on Siuslaw National Forest Roads. September 5, 2012.