



September 12, 2020

Vicki Christiansen, Chief
USDA Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW, MS 1111
Washington, D.C. 20250-1111

RE: Great American Outdoors Act Virtual Sensing Opportunity, Region Six #NP-2650

Dear Chief Christiansen,

Thank you for your work on behalf of our public lands as we face unprecedented challenges across the nation. The Mountaineers writes to support the Washington state trails and recreation projects put forth in the U.S. Forest Service Region 6 Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) proposed project list.

The Mountaineers, based in Seattle, Washington and founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is “to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.” The Mountaineers Books publishing division expands the mission internationally through award-winning publications including instructional guides, adventure narratives, and conservation photography. 1,600 skilled volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education trips and courses annually for 14,000 members. Our youth programs provide over 10,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. We are a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors, and protects the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

Washington state is experiencing an exponential increase in the number of recreationists visiting our public lands and waters. This began even before the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of a growing population and increased interest in outdoor recreation. At the same time, our National Forests face threats from climate change, forest health, and wildfires.

The Mountaineers is excited by the passage of GAOA and the opportunity to finally tackle deferred maintenance on public lands, including national forests and grasslands. These long-awaited funds will provide much-needed maintenance and improved recreation experiences for our community. We are supportive of the proposed Region 6 projects that seek to improve trails and recreation, including but not limited to the Mountains to Sound Greenway-Heritage Area Multi Asset Recreation Investment Corridor; Mountain Loop Highway Corridor Enhancement: Bridges, Picnic Sites, Trailheads, Trails;



Regional Trail Bridge Replacement and Maintenance; and Pacific Crest Trail & Pacific Northwest Trail Maintenance (OR & WA).

We encourage the Forest Service to continue to prioritize Washington state trail and recreation projects in future GAOA project lists. It is imperative to prioritize these projects to meet current demand for outdoor recreation and keep up with the increasing desire of Washingtonians to pursue outdoor recreation opportunities on USFS lands. Doing so will also benefit our state's \$26.5 billion outdoor recreation economy and the many jobs, businesses, and rural communities it supports.

The Mountaineers are grateful for funding for local projects from the Great American Outdoors Act, and for the hard work of Forest Service staff. Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
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