

March 19, 2021

Ms. Candace Vahlsing
Program Associate Director for Natural Resources
Office of Management & Budget
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Ms. Vahlsing:

We, the undersigned hunting and fishing conservation organizations, are working on behalf of America's 40 million hunters and anglers and are writing to support continuation of the efforts of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to increase access to the outdoors. This important work is helping to increase public awareness of federal land recreational access opportunities and restrictions, which in turn is reducing barriers to entry for more Americans to get outside.

Handheld GPS devices and smartphone applications have transformed the way the public accesses and navigates Federal lands. No longer do people rely solely on paper maps and trailheads; smartphone applications can tell a user within nine feet where they are standing in proximity to property boundaries, creeks, trails, roads, campgrounds, and other features.

These technologies are increasingly affordable and make recreation information more accessible to all Americans, helping to fuel the \$788 billion outdoor recreation economy. Unfortunately, public land users and land management professionals cannot utilize the full benefit of these technologies because of the following shortcomings in Federal land management agency data systems:

- Most recreational opportunities on Federal lands are identified in agency management plans and may appear on agency-produced paper maps that show, for instance, roads and trails open to motorized vehicles, areas with firearm restrictions, or lakes with motorized boat restrictions. While some of this information might, in certain places, be available in a GPS-compatible format, in many places it is not, or it is in a format that isn't of value for recreation. As a result, it is difficult for the public to find specific information about available recreation opportunities on public lands or even follow the rules that the agencies' spent millions of dollars creating.
- In many places where Federal land trail and road access exists across private land, that access was established through an interest in land known as an easement. Unfortunately, most Federal agency access easement records are still held on paper files at local offices and cannot be integrated into digital mapping systems. As of 2020, the U.S. Forest Service alone had an estimated 37,000 recorded easements and only 5,000 had been digitized and uploaded into their Land Status Record System. As a result of these shortfalls, the agencies and the public are precluded from taking a holistic look at where access exists, where it doesn't exist, and where it could be improved across federal holdings. If this is the case, the federal land management agencies will not be able to make the most strategic use of Land and Water Conservation Fund recreational access dollars.

To increase equitable access to the outdoors, and to create efficiencies at the federal land management agencies, we recommend that the President's FY22 budget request include the following budget amounts:

U.S. Forest Service:

We recommend increasing funding of the U.S. Forest Service budget by \$5 million, specifically targeted to:

- The digitizing of Federal interests, including easements and rights of way, on private lands to which the Federal Government does not have a fee title interest, and that is used to provide recreational access to federal lands (**\$3 million in the Land Management budget**); and
- The standardization, digitization and to make publicly available Geographic Information System (GIS) layers for boundaries of areas where hunting or recreational shooting is regulated or closed; and for boundaries of any portion of a body of water on federal lands that are closed to entry or watercraft or have gasoline motor or horsepower limitations (**\$2 million in the Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness budget**).

Bureau of Land Management:

We recommend increasing funding of the BLM Recreation Management budget by \$5 million, specifically targeted to:

- The digitizing of Federal interests, including easements and rights of way, on private lands to which the Federal Government does not have a fee title interest, and that is used to provide recreational access to federal lands; and
- The standardization, digitization and to make publicly available Geographic Information System (GIS) layers for boundaries of areas where hunting or recreational shooting is regulated or closed; the dates on which roads and trails on the federal lands are seasonally open or closed, and the types of vehicles that are allowed on each segment of the roads and trails (in locations where a travel management plan has been completed), and for boundaries of any portion of a body of water on federal lands that are closed to entry or watercraft, or have gasoline motor or horsepower limitations.

These funding priorities are critically important to bring the management of our public lands into the 21st century, and specifically provide the public with easily accessible information on public access and use, which has widespread support of hunting and non-hunting-based recreation and conservation organizations. We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you on a budget that supports access to our public lands.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
California Waterfowl
Camp Fire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Houston Safari Club

Izaak Walton League of America
Mule Deer Foundation
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Deer Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Falconers Association
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Ruffed Grouse Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi