

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,  
and Forestry  
328-A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Joe Manchin  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural  
Resources  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,  
and Forestry  
328-A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural  
Resources  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

18 May, 2021

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Boozman, and Ranking Member Barrasso,

The undersigned organizations, which represent millions of hunters, anglers, wildlife professionals, and other conservationists, write to express our strong support for critical investment in our natural infrastructure through funding for restoration and management of America's National Forests within infrastructure and job creation legislation being negotiated and developed in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. Specifically, we encourage you to support \$40 billion for federal forest restoration and \$5 billion for reforestation over the next 10 years.

President Biden's American Jobs Plan outlined a goal to "Maximize the resilience of land and water resources to protect communities and the environment." Restoration and management of National Forests is an investment in our natural infrastructure that protects our communities and water resources, provides natural climate solutions, promotes wildlife conservation, supports the surging economic contributions of hunting and the overall outdoor recreation industry, and delivers jobs to American workers in communities across the country.

### **Protecting our Communities, Climate, and Water**

In the United States, there are 193 million acres managed by the U.S. Forest Service. More than 80 million acres of National Forest land is in critical need of active management to restore environmental function, provide quality habitat, and reduce risk of catastrophic wildfires. Active management and restoration of forests can reduce extreme wildfire events that threaten human lives and infrastructure. U.S. forests also currently offset 11% of total U.S. carbon emissions. Forests could store approximately 30% of needed carbon reductions according to the United

Nations. Scientifically based forest management can influence carbon storage (the total amount of carbon kept out of the atmosphere, generally higher in older stands) and carbon sequestration (the amount of carbon removed from the atmosphere in an individual year, generally higher in younger stands). Furthermore, our nation's forests play a key role in providing a steady supply of naturally filtered water. Healthy forests act like a sponge, holding snowmelt and rain that cycles through river systems and ultimately providing 55% of the drinking water for our country. Restoring forests and creating resilient forest cover in a watershed leads to at least a 20% decrease in costs for water treatment downstream. Restoring forests, avoiding forest conversion, reducing dramatic carbon emissions and loss of water filtration from significant wildfire events, and improving forest management each delivers substantial carbon savings and economic benefits.

### **Promoting Wildlife Conservation, Outdoor Recreation, and Jobs**

The Administration's recently released "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful" report makes a commitment for federal efforts to build on state programs and support local conservation efforts. Restoration and management of National Forest lands is critical to meeting this commitment. The loss of young forest habitat has had serious consequences for wildlife populations. Ruffed grouse are now listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation need in 19 states, including many eastern states where National Forest lands provide critical core ruffed grouse habitat. Similar changes in forest habitat across the nation have driven dramatic declines in populations of many other forest birds and game and non-game wildlife. Research has shown that some of our most popular hunted species benefit from active forest management practices, including deer, elk, and wild turkeys. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the outdoor recreation industry, which includes hunting and fishing, generated \$778 billion in output, accounted for 2.2 percent of GDP, supported 5.2 million jobs, and was growing faster than the economy as a whole. A surge in outdoor recreation during the pandemic has driven additional increases in hunting and other outdoor activities. As visitors continue to rely on our National Forest lands for hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities, Congress can ensure these lands provide rewarding experiences by sustaining habitat to bolster these activities and the outdoor recreation economy. Furthermore, every \$1 billion invested in conservation infrastructure creates 15,000 to 28,000 jobs – a better return than many other sectors – and the project work supports positions in diverse job fields at solid median U.S. wages.

### **America Needs a \$45 Billion Investment in Federal Forest Restoration**

Over the next 10 years, \$40 billion of collaborative federal forest management invested in shared stewardship with states, local communities, and conservation partners can begin restoring our federal forests and watershed health, while protecting our communities, providing jobs, and improving biodiversity. Investing in forest management is essential to treat the National Forest System lands at the highest risk for wildfire, including 20 million acres of western lands and 650,000 acres of eastern lands. An additional \$5 billion investment in reforestation will allow the U.S. Forest Service and state forestry agencies to increase seedling production capacity, hire and train reforestation crews, and begin increasing contractor capacity for reforestation work. The

Reforestation Hub estimates that such reforestation efforts are required on 11 million acres of federal lands. Failure to reforest these lands will create millions of acres of brushfields, which can be lower quality habitat and are vulnerable to future reburns. Active reforestation of these lands can also help sequester more than 16 million tons of carbon per year.

Proper stewardship and management of our National Forest lands have long provided critical natural infrastructure and invaluable benefits for recreation, conservation, ecosystem services, and natural climate solutions. Your bipartisan leadership and consideration of wise investment in these resources will promote economic contributions and job growth and protect our communities and resources. We look forward to working with and supporting your continued efforts through the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. Thank you for your consideration and continued service in support of America's outdoor heritage and conservation ethic.

Respectfully,

American Woodcock Society  
Boone and Crockett Club  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
National Deer Association  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
Ruffed Grouse Society  
Safari Club International  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Wildlife Management Institute