

December 13, 2023

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Senate Majority Leader

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair, Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member, Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee

Dear Senate Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chair Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chair Merkley, and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We write to express our general support for *S.2605 The Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 2024*. The Senate bill's funding levels for critical environment, public lands, conservation, and wildlife programs, though insufficient for the long-term, represent a bipartisan compromise that is significantly better than the bill passed by the House and should be defended as bicameral negotiations progress.

As we detail below, there are important items in *S. 2605* that deserve special attention and protection, and, just as importantly, scores of poison pill riders included in the House companion bill that must be kept out of both the Senate bill and any final Senate-House agreement on this legislation.. These provisions, which helped trigger a veto threat of the House bill from the Biden-Harris Administration, would undermine decades of bipartisan progress on critical programs that are supported and enjoyed by millions of people in this country each year.

PROTECT IMPORTANT CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

The Senate version of the FY24 Interior appropriations bill contains many provisions that are important to conserving and protecting our public lands and wildlife. Three of the most critical are:

National Conservation Lands: While visitation to these lands, which include some of the nation's most spectacular landscapes and outdoor recreational opportunities, has nearly doubled in the past decade or so, federal funds to maintain these properties and preserve their value to all Americans has failed to keep pace. At a minimum, the Senate should pass and any final agreement between the House and Senate should allocate at least the \$63,599,000 contained in the Senate Appropriations Committee's version of the bill. In addition, the final bill should be consistent with this language from the committee's report, "In order to sustain increased visitation, enhance visitor experiences, and administer the system's expansion, the [Bureau of Land Management] must complete land use plans for these special places."

National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund: This fund, passed as part of the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), addresses deferred maintenance and repairs to

recreation facilities, visitor centers, historic structures, roads, trails, and bridges. In addition to helping preserve important facilities, these projects create jobs that benefit local communities. The House and Senate versions of the FY24 Interior bill contain the \$1.9 billion authorized for this program.

Land and Water Conservation Fund: LWCF advances federal, state, and local efforts to conserve irreplaceable lands and expands access to the outdoors in communities across the country. We appreciate your work in FY23 to balance LWCF federal and state grant investments as enshrined in the John D. Dingell Conservation and Management Act, and continue the long-standing bipartisan support for LWCF. The House and Senate versions of the FY24 Interior bill contain the \$900 million guaranteed for this program. However, we were deeply disappointed by the Senate's proposed rescission of \$100 million in previously appropriated LWCF state and local grants funding. LWCF remains oversubscribed and there is backlog of time-sensitive conservation and recreation priorities throughout the country.

We appreciate the bipartisan support for these important programs and priorities which has enabled the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service to enhance conservation and wildlife connectivity, and repair long standing infrastructure projects. Critical funding for the National Conservation Lands will help BLM engage the public in the future management of these places.

REJECT HOUSE POISON PILL PROVISIONS

The House version of the FY24 Interior Appropriations bill contains more than 100 provisions and mandates that attack the federal government's efforts to protect the health of people and the environment, conserve our public lands, and preserve our wildlife.

The provisions listed below in the House Interior bill (*H.R. 4821*) are particularly damaging to efforts to protect and conserve our public lands. In particular, several sections of *H.R. 4821* would undermine the use of the Antiquities Act to designate new national monuments; this law was intended to protect some of our most iconic land and important history. For over one hundred years, the Antiquities Act has been used as a bipartisan conservation tool and should remain so. Two other sections would upend management of existing national monuments, preventing the agencies' duties to protect them.

We strongly urge Senators to oppose any efforts to include these or other anti-environmental provisions during either the Senate's floor consideration of this legislation or efforts to each agreement with the House.

- Prohibits obligating or expending funds to (1) develop, finalize, or issue a final rule with respect to the proposed rule entitled "Conservation and Landscape Health" published by the Bureau of Land Management in the Federal Register on April 23, 2023 ; or (2) implement, administer, or enforce such proposed rule or any substantially similar rule. (Section 490)
- Prohibits use of the funds for the management of the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument except in compliance with the Record of Decision and Approved Resource

Management Plans for the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, dated February 2020 (Section 471)

- Prohibition on finalization, enforcement, administration, and implementation of Rock Springs draft resource management plan revision from the Bureau of Land Management (Section 497)
- Prohibition on funding to establish or modify any national monuments under Antiquities Act within Colusa County, California (Section 498)
- Prohibition on funding to create national monuments in Malheur County, Oregon under the Antiquities Act (Section 502)
- Prohibition on funding to finalize, implement, or enforce a draft resource management plan and draft supplemental environmental impact statement to end new oil leases on 1.6 million acres in Colorado (Section 503)
- Prohibition on funding to implement, administer, or enforce Presidential Proclamation 10606 of August 8, 2023 relating to establishment of Baaj Nwaavjo I'itah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of Grand Canyon National Monument (Section 516)
- Prohibition on funding for the American Climate Corps (Section 525)

In closing, while the bipartisan budget caps are insufficient to meet the needs of environmental agencies, the funding in the FY24 Interior Appropriations bill reported by the Senate Appropriations Committee is critical and we support the bill as the minimum funding amount for this year. We look forward to working with you to ensure the Senate-passed bill as well as a final conference agreement with the House protects critical conservation priorities and resists efforts to include the damaging poison pill provisions contained in the House bill that helped draw a veto threat from the Biden-Harris Administration.

Sincerely,

California Environmental Voters
California Native Plant Society
Californians for Western Wilderness
CalWild
Coalition to Protect America's National
Parks
Conservation Colorado
COFEM
Conservation Lands Foundation
Endangered Species Coalition
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Friends of the Owyhee
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
GreenLatinos
Idaho Conservation League
League of Conservation Voters
Los Padres ForestWatch
Montana Conservation Voters
National Parks Conservation Association

Natural Resources Defense Council
Nature for All Coalition
Nevada Conservation League
New Mexico Wild
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Outdoor Alliance
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Sierra Club
Silvix Resources
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
The Mountain Pact
The Pew Charitable Trusts
The Wilderness Society
Trust for Public Land
Tuleyome
Vet Voice Foundation
Wild Montana
Wyoming Outdoor Council
Wyoming Wilderness Association