



March 4, 2016

The Honorable Patty Murray
 United States Senate
 154 Russell Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Fiscal Year 2017 Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Initiative Appropriation Request

Dear Senator Murray:

We are writing to thank you for your past support of the Forest Service’s Legacy Roads and Trails (LRT) program and express our strong support for continued funding in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 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 generated by adjacent National Forest lands. The work required to repair/upgrade critical roads needed for access, to decommission unneeded roads, to replace undersized culverts to improve fish passage, and otherwise remove other fish passage barriers, also directly supports these local jobs.

Legacy Roads and Trails is an example of a program that was created to focus on a specific set of problems, while producing far reaching benefits including improving water quality, salmon habitat, recreational access, and local economies. Since its inception in 2008, the program has received \$430 million nationally, with National Forests in Washington receiving nearly \$30 million. Peak funding for the Legacy Roads and Trails program was achieved at \$90 million in FY10 while FY14 marked an all-time low appropriation of \$35 million. Over the last two years (FY15 and FY16) the LRT fund was maintained at \$40 million. 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 roads and trails system, and to maintain the level of success achieved in past years.

FY17 Appropriations Request

We therefore urge you to at least restore Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails funding to a level of \$50 million in FY 2017. This modest funding request represents the average appropriation for this important fund over the past nine years. We also ask your support for report language stating, “the Forest Service is expected to allocate this funding in a manner proportionate to the distribution of roads in need of attention across the National Forest System and to direct funds to regions most in need of road remediation.” We remain concerned that although

Oregon and Washington contain 25% of the national Forest Service road network, the average funding allocation for this region is less than 20% of the total funding.

The following basic information is relevant to our FY17 Appropriations Request:

- **FUNDING PROGRAM:** U.S. Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program (internal Forest Service funding code: "CMLG")
- **SUBCOMMITTEE JURISDICTION:** Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
- **FY17 REQUEST:** \$50 million
- **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:** Since its authorization in FY 2008, the Legacy Roads and Trails program has significantly enhanced the Forest Service's ability to address problems associated with its aging and poorly maintained road system. This includes repairing roads and trails needed for public access, replacing failed or undersized culverts to benefit fish populations, and preventing sediment pollution from entering waterways important for salmon, trout, and other aquatic species. The program delivers funds to address road problems in real time, which enables the Forest Service to efficiently plan, design, and implement restoration treatments. It is a successful tool for leveraging non-federal funds resulting in stronger projects and enhanced community engagement. And because funds primarily go to actual work on the ground, Legacy Roads and Trails creates high wage jobs for contractors, including those who specialize in stream restoration, environmental design, and heavy equipment operation.

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 cutting programs. 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.

Because the roads were not designed for the long-terms, time, neglect and storms are taking their toll. This oversized road system is rapidly falling apart and causing a number of problems. Decaying, unmaintained roads erode and feed sediment into streams, polluting water, damaging fish populations, and reducing fishing opportunities. Unneeded roads fragment habitat, reducing deer and elk herds and related hunting opportunities. Slides and washouts have blocked road access to trailheads, camp-grounds and other popular recreation destinations. Neglected roads cost taxpayers many millions more in repair and stream cleanup costs the longer they are ignored.

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.

Program Benefits and Demonstrated Success

The Legacy Roads and Trails program provides crucial funding to maintain and improve roads required for recreation and administration 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 a standard that will allow greater and more reliable access.

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

Legacy Roads funding also produces jobs in local communities. On average, between 352-528 jobs are created or maintained each year bringing dollars and jobs into rural communities that also rely on the forest for drinking water and recreation. This work has the added benefit of reducing the financial liability to America's taxpayers by saving \$3.5 million on annual road maintenance costs per year (nationally).

Key program benefits in Washington include (2008-2015):

- **2,112 miles of roads maintained** to increase their ability to stand-up during powerful storms and ensure safe access
- **267 miles of unneeded roads reclaimed** to reconnect habitat and greatly reduce the delivery of sediment to streams
- **105 miles of trails upgraded** to guarantee recreationists can reliably use the places they love;
- **53 stream crossings and bridges fixed** for fish passage to upstream and downstream habitat and for public safety and access

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 \$50 million in funding for this program in the FY17 Interior-Environment Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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