

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

August 25, 2021

Sen. Debbie Stabenow

Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

731 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Rep. David Scott

Chair, House Agriculture Committee

468 Cannon House Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Re: FY22 Budget Reconciliation and the Civilian Climate Corps

Dear Chair Stabenow and Chair Scott:

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for your efforts in leading a generational investment in our country's infrastructure—including public lands and waters—and, most importantly, towards addressing the climate crisis. While our organization's focus is on land and water conservation and policy, the FY22 budget reconciliation process will be an opportunity to mobilize a government-wide and nation-wide effort to address the climate crisis; this crisis gravely affects our public lands and waters, and climate solutions across a range of subject areas will inure to their benefit. While we strongly support a full range of investments to address the climate crisis, we write to share our particular perspectives on an important element of the FY22 budget reconciliation instructions, the Civilian Climate Corps.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.



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Benefits of a Modern CCC

President Biden's proposed Civilian Climate Corps (CCC) program is, in part, based on President Franklin D. Roosevelt's successful Civilian Conservation Corps program that provided public work relief to millions of Americans from 1933-1942. The original Civilian Conservation Corps served as a job training program that also protected and developed America's natural resources, and extensive improvements to America's public lands implemented by the CCC are still evident today.

Although there are a variety of administrative and legislative efforts to create a modern day CCC, including notably Sen. Wyden and Rep. Neguse's "21st Century Conservation Corp for Our Health and Our Jobs Act," all of the proposals include similar themes: strengthening climate resilience, restoring and maintaining public lands and waters, supporting the clean energy economy, providing a living wage and job training, creating and enhancing sustainable recreation infrastructure, and supporting local economies—especially those of rural and marginalized communities. A successful CCC program hinges on the integration of the entire ecosystem of stakeholders, including government agencies and nonprofit partner organizations, to identify and scope projects, recruit local workers and conservation corps groups, provide training on ecosystem restoration and recreation infrastructure improvement, oversee project implementation, and analyze the efficacy of ongoing CCC initiatives.

Outdoor Alliance supports a modern CCC because the program would enable a strong and integrated approach to climate change, conservation, equitable and sustainable recreation access, and local economic development. Tackling the impacts of climate change, such as the increased risk of mega-fires, while restoring ecosystems, improving recreation access, and creating new jobs is a winning strategy for moving America forward on environmental resilience and away from the pandemic-induced economic downturn. The CCC would create new job opportunities in the rapidly growing clean energy, ecosystem restoration, and recreation industries for both urban centers and rural communities, while at the same time inspiring a new generation of conservationists and healthy outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

Currently, a robust, existing network of partners, including outdoor recreation groups, public land friends' groups, conservation groups, trail organizations, and



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other entities is available to provide expertise that can expand program impact and make efforts more successful. A modern day CCC must support the entire ecosystem of partners engaged in this work.

Outdoor Recreation Non-Profit Partnerships

Outdoor recreation organizations, including OA member groups, routinely partner with public land managers to fund, scope, plan and implement activity-specific, specialized recreation infrastructure projects. Rock climbing and mountain biking infrastructure, for example, are unique, and project management expertise is essential to producing high quality work and providing worthwhile training experiences for young workers interested in pursuing careers in conservation and recreation infrastructure development. Similar dynamics are at play in other areas where CCC workers could productively be deployed: including a role for experts in the relevant fields of work is essential, from both project delivery and career training perspectives. As Congress works to create a new CCC program, guidelines must allow nonprofit recreation organizations that contract with qualified conservation corps to be included in the definition of “Project Partner” and meet the criteria for program funding. In fact, many corps program graduates move on to work at nonprofit organizations that improve public land infrastructure and enhance recreation opportunities. Maintaining an open pipeline for workers to evolve into mentors and advance their careers in conservation and outdoor recreation fields is critical for recruitment and delivering on the full promise of the program.

Consideration of Recreation During Restoration Planning

The outdoor recreation community strongly supports a holistic approach to landscape restoration and improvement through the CCC. We are pleased that most of the current CCC proposals are clear that recreation resources should be considered when planning projects that improve water quality, prevent wildfire, restore habitat, and create resilient ecosystems. Recreation infrastructure projects, such as sustainable trail systems, often dovetail with environmental protection goals by focusing visitor impacts, minimizing erosion and soil denudation, improving water quality, and protecting sensitive species. In addition, improved recreation resources can provide better access and opportunities for marginalized communities and promote health and wellness. Close coordination between land



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managers and local recreation advocates can help ensure that recreation opportunities are protected and enhanced instead of being unintentionally harmed.

Maintaining, Improving, and Developing Recreation Infrastructure

Civilian Climate Corps program funding should be available not only to improve and maintain existing recreation infrastructure, but also to create new opportunities for sustainable recreation. Underserved communities often do not have access to high-quality recreation opportunities, which makes it particularly important to consider the development of close-to-home recreation infrastructure. Additionally, recreational infrastructure often does not consider opportunities for improved connectivity with adjacent communities. Civilian Climate Corps program funds can help recruit and employ local stakeholders to work on new recreation projects that support the health of underserved communities and gateway communities to our public lands. Limiting the CCC program to only restoration and maintenance projects would miss an opportunity to expand America's recreation system and create pathways for more diverse workers to join the conservation and recreation industries.

Federal Land Management Agency Funding

For the Civilian Climate Corps to have the greatest impact, it must include direct funding for land management agencies to support individual projects. While a CCC program of any stripe will provide a valuable boost in the form of on-the-ground workers (who in turn can help form a new, more diverse pipeline of workers in stewardship professions), only federal land managers can perform certain key functions, like land management planning and environmental analysis, that are necessary steps in the project implementation process. A CCC program without increased funding for land managers risks creating a bottleneck that will stymie efforts to effectively employ new resources. The CCC program must provide direct capacity-building funding to the Department of the Interior land management agencies and the USDA Forest Service. Additional resources can then be used to contract with corps and nonprofit recreation organizations to carry out CCC projects on public lands and provide the necessary resources for technical support and oversight.



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Project Examples

Recreation organizations have a significant history of working with conservation corps on projects to benefit public lands and recreational access. The list below provides some examples of projects that strengthen climate resilience, improve recreation opportunities, create new jobs, and support local economies:

1. In collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management, Access Fund has designed restoration plans to reduce erosion, protect critical habitat, and improve visitor flow throughout Bears Ears National Monument. Access Fund has secured several funding sources to cover its field staff oversight and hire multiple Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps crews to complete this critical work. Completed project designs and anticipated approval will cover field work for several years to come, following which greater funding will be critical.
2. Access Fund, in partnership with the National Park Service, recently completed a comprehensive restoration project at the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve where Appalachian Conservation Corps members worked alongside Access Fund and NPS field staff on a host of activities. Access Fund provided initial project design and justification, secured the necessary funding, and hired Appalachian Conservation Corps crews while working in close planning collaboration with NPS staff on compliance, schedules, and field support.
3. In collaboration with the San Juan National Forest, the Colorado Mountain Club has developed a snow ranger program to provide additional staff capacity to manage winter recreation on the forest. Similar snow ranger programs have sprung out of National Forest partnerships with service organizations, such as between the Payette National Forest and Student Conservation Association. Additional funding would allow Colorado Mountain Club, Winter Wildlands Alliance, and others to develop more snow ranger programs in partnership with the Forest Service to help manage the exponential growth in backcountry winter recreation on National Forest lands and prepare new participants for work with land management agencies.
4. With support from local Sacramento climbing advocates and the Eldorado National Forest, Access Fund is leading a large-scale stabilization and technical stone work project at Lovers Leap in Eldorado National Forest.



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Access Fund provided the initial proposal and project design to USDA Forest Service staff for compliance review while working to secure the necessary funding and hiring American Conservation Experience Conservation Corp members to work alongside Access Fund Conservation Team field staff.

5. In partnership with the USDA Forest Service, the Colorado Mountain Club is designing and managing a 3-mile re-route of the Colorado Trail to reduce habitat impacts and improve user safety. CMC crews, Southwest Conservation Corps crews, and local contractors are working together to establish a more sustainable trail alignment as well as mitigate erosion and riparian and stream impacts from the existing route.
6. Using the Colorado Mountain Club's Recreation Impact Monitoring System (RIMS) mobile app, recreation users, conservation corps members and stewardship groups have identified more than 1000 critical maintenance issues like erosion, downed trees, and campsite impacts on federal public lands. Volunteers have been able to resolve some of the issues, but additional funding would help increase the efficiency of inventory, issue reporting, and collaborative issue resolution.
7. In Washington, the state's Department of Natural Resources and Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance partnered to develop a mountain bike trail system on North Mountain in Darrington, WA. Both DNR and Evergreen hired Washington Conservation Corps crews, who worked alongside DNR and Evergreen's crews to construct the trail system. North Mountain offers 14 miles of trails in a rural community that was affected by the 2014 Oso Landslide. The trails help to spur economic activity in the area and offer recreational opportunities for local youth.

The projects listed above are examples of the potential collaborative activities that can be broadly scaled with an effective CCC program, providing meaningful training opportunities for corps members and benefits to recreational access and resource conservation, while also helping communities build out the recreation infrastructure that helps support vibrant local economies.

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The outdoor recreation community vigorously supports the ambition to make a game-changing investment in climate change response through the FY22 budget reconciliation process. A properly designed and implemented CCC program—



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embracing the myriad participants in the landscape of entities performing on-the-ground stewardship work—will make a strong contribution to improving forest and ecosystem health, provide job training and work opportunities, and invest in local economies. At the same time, this program will help to contribute to a more just and equitable system of public lands, both by establishing a career path for more diverse participants in resource stewardship and recreation development, and by building out the recreational resources that will facilitate more equitable access to the outdoors. We welcome any opportunity to assist in the development of a new CCC and support your efforts.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Sen. Ron Wyden
Rep. Joe Neguse

Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Todd Walton, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Mitsu Iwasaki, Chief Executive Officer, American Alpine Club
Sarah Bradham, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas
Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club
Chad Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

