The Honorable Jeff Merkley The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

Chair Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, Subcommittee on Interior,

& Related Agencies Environment, & Related Agencies

The Honorable Chellie Pingree The Honorable David Joyce

Chair Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, Subcommittee on Interior,

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June 22, 2021

Dear Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, Chairwoman Pingree and Ranking Member Joyce,

**On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we write in strong support of the FY22 president’s budget for the National Park Service.** We ask you to support this budget in as it provides many areas of needed relief for an underfunded agency that protects our natural and cultural treasures, invites millions of Americans and international visitors each year to enjoy them, and provides programs that assist tribes and communities in preserving our heritage. National parks have record levels of visitation and are facing significant climate impacts all at a time when parks have lost record numbers of employees and support costs. Programming has long fallen behind the need to serve communities, and critical maintenance needs continue.

We greatly appreciate the recent funding increases for the National Park Service (NPS), which have been important to maintain the visitor experience and resource protection. Unfortunately, much more is needed to provide the level of support that can get our parks back on track. For example, between 2011 and 2019, the park service lost 16% of its staff while at the same time struggling to accommodate a 17% increase in visitation. While the FY21 bill is providing some needed relief, staffing for our national parks is still creating major challenges for park superintendents who are struggling with reduced spending power and are unable to hire lapsed positions.

**First, we support the president’s budget proposal to increase the operations account by $295 million above FY21.** This level would help return more than a thousand staff to our national parks as well as regional and program offices, supporting critical natural resource work, addressing climate change, providing scientific expertise, and more. Natural resource protection work has long been lagging, and these funds would, among other benefits, help provide funding for completing essential large-scale restoration projects. The requested funding would also provide guiding baseline conditions to help superintendents have the information they need to adapt management to a changing climate.

We request supportfor the budget’s investment in natural and cultural programs in the **National Recreation and Preservation account** **but wish to note our disappointment with the proposed cut to the Heritage Partnership Program and ask you to reject that cut.** The budget supports programs including but not limited to the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership; American Battlefield Protection Program; the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps Program; the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program; the Chesapeake Gateways and Trails, Japanese American Confinement Sites; and the NPS Historically Black Colleges and Universities Internship Program. We also wholeheartedly support the Civilian Climate Corps program that builds on these and other programs to create jobs, train the next generation of resource stewards, and help our parks adapt to climate change. We commend the support for parks and program operations that preserve and tell the story of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups, including the increase for the African American Civil Rights Network. These and other external programs are so important for states and cities and that fund historic preservation, heritage areas, landmarks, rivers and trails, and more.

We commend the investment in the **Historic Preservation Fund** including for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, important components of the administration’s commendable whole-of-government approach to advancing equity and justice. Finally, we support the investment in **park maintenance, land acquisition and planning.** We are pleased to see the project lists for both maintenance and land acquisition through the Great American Outdoors Act but encourage greater transparency with project details in future president’s budgets. That historic law will not address all park maintenance needs, so we commend the increase for line-item construction. Other important increases in the Construction account include the Selma Interpretive Center and Climate Vulnerability Assessments that will help park personnel direct resources towards the greatest needs.

**In conclusion, we respectfully urge you to include the full $380.5 million increase for the National Park Service.** These many strategic investments, including but by no means limited to those highlighted above, will help our parks recover from years of insufficient staffing, provide resources to create jobs and adapt to climate change, provide programming important to communities, and conserve and maintain our parks.

Thank you for considering our views,

Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks

National Parks Conservation Association

[additional signers here]