

The Honorable Angus King, Jr.
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steve Daines
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Parks
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

May 9, 2022

Dear Chairman King and Ranking Member Daines:

We are writing on behalf of the National Trails Community to express support for the National Scenic Trails Parity Act, S. 2964, (Parity Act) introduced by Senator Baldwin. We represent National Scenic and Historic Trail co-managing non-governmental organizations with extensive experience co-managing our National Scenic and Historic Trails with our agency partners in the federal and state governments and the millions of users and volunteers that recreate on and steward these trails. Thank you for holding a legislative hearing to consider the Parity Act. We respectfully request that our letter be included in the formal hearing record.

National Scenic and Historic Trails (NSHTs) established under the National Trails System Act of 1968 are “partnership parks,” co-managed by non-governmental entities that facilitate volunteer maintenance and participation in the stewardship of these special public lands. For those that are administered by the National Park Service (NPS), the NSHTs are part of the National Park System. Three of the National Scenic Trails administered by the National Park Service (NPS)—the Appalachian, Potomac Heritage, and Natchez Trace—possess what is referred to within the NPS as “unit status,” while the three other National Scenic Trails—the Ice Age, New England, and North Country—possess a lesser administrative status than “unit.” The Parity Act would recognize “unit status” for the three National Scenic Trails (NSTs) that the NPS does not currently recognize as units, despite being established under the same legislative authority as those three trails with unit status. Passage of the Parity Act would create administrative clarity and improved management. By confirming that these three trails are, in fact, “units,” Congress can ensure that all of the National Park Service’s NSTs are treated in the same manner.

As partners in supporting a robust National Trails System and a strong recreation economy, we know it is critical that the federal land management agencies support the resources under their care. As a community, we repeatedly see the inequities in how opportunities and funding are allocated among the National Scenic Trails. The three affected trails have been denied funding for planning, natural resource management, staff capacity, and have been left out of major promotional opportunities that are available to other National Parks and that must be remedied on the basis of an administrative process and not on the will of Congress.

The recognition of unit status for these three trails will in no way diminish our trails, nor will it diminish any other unit of the National Park System. Congress designates all National Scenic Trails for the same purpose, under the same statute, to have the same access to funding and opportunity within the National

Park System.. We believe all components of the National Trails System should all have the same access to the support and resources that they need to be successfully and cooperatively managed, as Congress intends by designating them.

At a time when more and more Americans are looking to safely and responsibly enjoy the outdoors, the National Scenic Trails Parity Act honors the scenic, natural, recreational, cultural, and historical resources Congress set out to protect in designating these trails as well as the ability of non-governmental organizations and volunteers to play an active role in stewarding these resources for the benefit of the American people, always.

Thank you for considering this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Ala Kahakai Trail Association

American Hiking Society

American Trails

Appalachian Mountain Club

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Arizona Trail Association

Back Country Horsemen of America

Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Continental Divide Trail Association

Florida Trail Association

Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance

National Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Association, Inc.

Overmountain Victory Trail Association

Pacific Crest Trail Association

Pacific Northwest Trail Association

Partnership for the National Trails System