

TESTIMONY OF  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES  
MARCH 10, 2020

Madam Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the Committee: thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify.

As the Committee begins to draft this year's appropriations legislation, I strongly urge you to provide critical funding for important conservation programs that preserve this country's rich history and natural beauty. This Congress, we have made significant progress in protecting our public lands and spaces, in large part thanks to the leadership and hard work of this Committee. I'd like to use my time to share some examples of the important stewardship work being done in my district and highlight the ways in which the Committee can continue to support those efforts.

The John H. Chafee Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor, which spans more than two dozen towns from my hometown of Worcester, Massachusetts to Providence, Rhode Island, tells the remarkable story of the economic, environmental, social, and cultural transformation of the industrial revolution in America at its birthplace. Vital to the success of the Heritage Corridor – and the unit of the National Park Service within it – is strong funding for the National Park Service and a commitment to the cooperative agreement that NPS has undertaken with the local coordinating entity. In order to continue the success of this special place, I request that the committee fully fund the National Park Service. Furthermore, I ask that the Committee consider specific language that would encourage NPS enter into a cooperative agreement in the coming fiscal year. I have included for your consideration draft language at the end of my testimony.

Next, I would like to highlight the importance of our National Wildlife Refuge System. Specifically, I would like to draw your attention to the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge, which spans the entirety of the Connecticut River watershed and comprises fully one-sixth of the entire area of New England. Those who are charged with the audacious task of safeguarding the Refuge do extraordinary work thanks to support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which in Conte's case is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Yet despite the growing backlog of projects across the refuge, Conte received zero dollars in LWCF funding in the current fiscal year, and FWS has not been forthcoming in explaining the rationale this behind lack of allocation. I appreciate the Committee's previous efforts to highlight the importance of Conte, and I am grateful for any further efforts that might better prioritize or direct funds to the refuge. I also ask that the Committee fully fund LWCF so that Conte can receive the priority funding that it needs and deserves.

I would now like to say a few words about the newest of the country's eleven national scenic trails, the New England National Scenic Trail, which was established in 2009. Nearly two million people live within 10 miles of the trail, which spans 220 miles through Massachusetts and Connecticut, and it has grown significantly in popularity in its first decade. This is no doubt thanks to the excellent management of the nonprofit partners who care for it, and it is critical that federal funding keep up with increased demand for the recreational and educational opportunities that the trail provides. I ask the Committee to provide full funding for the National Park Service so that the New England National Scenic Trail can be funded at \$500,000 in the coming fiscal year.

Lastly, I'd like to briefly mention something outside of conservation and recreation that has been a priority of mine for a long time, I am pleased to say that the Committee has always been supportive. Clean, safe water is a right for every person in this country, and I am again asking this committee to support the highest possible funding for both the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund. These programs help communities across the country maintain safe and effective water infrastructure, and they afford states the flexibility to fund their highest-priority projects.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

### **Language Request for FY21 Interior Appropriations Request**

“The Subcommittee directs the National Park Service to enter into and fund cooperative agreements with the local coordinating entity for the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor.”