

Testimony of Leslie Mattson
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Subcommittee on Federal Lands
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Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for traveling here to Grand Teton National Park to discuss how we can work together to support these spectacular places in our nation. Your personal presence is a meaningful demonstration of your commitment to our parks.

It is my privilege to serve as president of the Grand Teton National Park Foundation, an organization that has been acting on behalf of America's great outdoors for more than 27 years. Through our close partnership with the National Park Service, we have strengthened Grand Teton through the power of philanthropy, raising more than \$150 million to significantly improve visitor experiences, conserve the wildlife and natural resources that draw people here, preserve our cultural heritage, and engage young people in hands-on conservation work. Our work impacts every corner of this park and ensures it inspires visitors, now and for generations to come.

You can see the impact of our public-private partnership right here. In 2019 we completed a comprehensive renewal of the Jenny Lake area that was made possible by \$14.5 million in private philanthropy that leveraged \$6 million in federal funds. The congestion and confusion that once marked the area where we are seated was greatly improved by the construction of directional pathways, larger boat docks, increased restroom facilities, and designated areas for people of all abilities to rest and take in the stunning views. We also helped the National Park Service dramatically improve access to iconic places on the other side of the lake like Inspiration Point and Hidden Falls by building new stone steps, smoothing and leveling trails, and ensuring better drainage for rainwater and snowmelt. The result is a world-class, accessible visitor plaza and a sustainable network of backcountry trails that welcomes millions each year while protecting a popular and beloved place. This is an incredible example of what we can do together. Philanthropic organizations like Grand Teton National Park Foundation can leverage a core investment from the federal government and, with the generous support of dedicated donors, we can achieve extraordinary things.

Jenny Lake is one example among many. The first major collaboration between our organization and the National Park Service was the construction of the 22,000 square foot Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center near park headquarters. For that project, we leveraged an \$8.5 million congressional appropriation to raise \$16.8 million in private-sector gifts. The center has since reimagined how people first connect with this landscape and learn about the park. Through our nearly completed Snake River Gateways project, we have improved recreational access to the river at hugely popular sites while providing for natural resource protection. We're also advancing projects at Mormon Row and Taggart Lake to improve the visitor experience at alternative destinations in the park that can ease pressure on iconic and popular areas like Jenny Lake. These efforts are part of a broader, ongoing portfolio of more than two dozen annual programs and projects that serve people and protect the park.

The Great American Outdoors Act and its Legacy Restoration Fund have been critical for Grand Teton, but there is more work to be done in order to continue to provide a world-class visitor experience befitting our nation and its parks. Our supporters are discerning individuals, foundations, and corporations who want to know that their philanthropic support is complementing, not replacing, core federal investment in national park protection and improvements. They don't see their support as venture start-up capital but rather as a very personal and proud contribution to the sustained commitment our nation has had to a national park that will soon turn 100 years old. For this reason, every project we undertake as a partner has a federal investment.

The reauthorization of the Great American Outdoors Act and Legacy Restoration Fund can sharpen this model. First, we can shift from only focusing on the deferred maintenance of the past to also preparing our parks for the future—modernizing visitor-facing infrastructure that improves access, education, and resource protection. Second, by allowing flexible matching and the ability to transfer federal matching dollars directly to trusted partners like the Grand Teton National Park Foundation to contract and deliver high quality work in a timely manner—stretching every public and private dollar.

These improvements will provide critical support to a national need that we also see here at Grand Teton National Park. We continue to experience increased visitation and recreational use in the park, including in areas that were not typically highly used. We will need to continue to make strategic investments to improve these areas but to also prepare alternative destinations in other places in the park, like Colter Bay, to accommodate use while protecting both the visitor experience, and the wildlife and scenery that draws them here. Extending the program better aligns with how complex, high impact projects are planned and delivered, and it will provide the predictability needed for partners, contractors, and federal managers to do this work well. That's smart stewardship and smart service to the public.

I can tell you with great confidence from my experience at Grand Teton that the shared investment you're considering through the reauthorization of the Great American Outdoors Act will provide an incredible return. That impact will not only economically benefit our community, our state, and our nation, but it will also reinfuse a bit of the magic of a visit to a national park. An improved visitor experience facilitates a broad and deep connection to what makes this place so incredible. Those connections in turn inspire park supporters to provide financial assistance for future projects.

For nearly three decades, Grand Teton National Park Foundation has been a steadfast, solutions-oriented partner to the National Park Service. We are committed to continuing that legacy—bringing private philanthropy to the table, aligning with park priorities, and delivering projects that are tangible, durable, and worthy of this extraordinary place.

I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to reauthorize the Great American Outdoors Act and to strengthen its public-private partnership provisions. When federal investment and private philanthropy work together to meet a clear set of priorities, the results speak for themselves—right here at Jenny Lake, and across Grand Teton.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.