

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 22, 2023

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

As you consider the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year (“FY”) 2024, we respectfully request that you provide **\$25 million for the National Park Service (NPS) Every Kid Outdoors program**. This vital initiative gives fourth graders and their families free entry to national parks for a full year. With proper funding, this program has the potential to dramatically increase access to parks, historical sites, and other public lands. An appropriation of \$25 million would help more than one million children each year visit our national parks, launch targeted programs for underserved communities and children with disabilities, and provide the transportation that is the greatest barrier to park access. Our country is blessed with rich history and beautiful landscapes, and it is our privilege as Members of Congress to make these places accessible to our nation's children.

The Every Kid Outdoors program was established in 2015 as a public/private partnership under the name “Every Kid in a Park.” Fourth graders were chosen for a variety of educational and logistical reasons. Many states teach state history during fourth grade, making National Park programs particularly relevant to the grade. In addition, research suggests that the most direct route to caring for the environment as an adult is spending time in the “wild” outdoors before age 11.¹ Fourth graders also typically have one teacher (rather than multiple teachers as in higher grades) enabling schools to more easily plan trips. Initial success led the Department of the Interior to request \$20 million for the program in both their FY16 and FY17 budgets. Although Congress did not fulfill these requests, in 2019 it passed the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (PL 116-9). This law codified the Every Kid in a Park initiative under its current name and authorized it for a period of seven years, but left the program unfunded.

The Every Kid Outdoors program can help keep National Parks the affordable, accessible destination for working and middle class families that they always have been—if it is fully funded. Currently, it costs \$80 for an annual National Park pass, or between \$20-\$35 for single vehicle entry at most locations. This is a meaningful amount of money for many Americans, especially combined with food, gas, and lodging. Every Kid Outdoors can defray these costs if

¹ Nancy M. Wells, and Kristi S. Lekies. “Nature and the Life Course: Pathways from Childhood Nature Experiences to Adult Environmentalism.” *Children, Youth and Environments*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2006. Retrieved at: www.jstor.org/stable/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.16.1.0001.

people know about the program. The \$20 million requested in past presidential budgets will enable NPS to effectively promote Every Kid Outdoors and grow participation, currently reaches a mere 200,000 children per year. It will also enable NPS to provide transportation to National Parks for more than one million children from underserved communities through their elementary schools. National Parks should be accessible to all American families and children, which is why we request an additional \$5 million for outreach and programs for youth with disabilities.

This request is particularly timely as our nation recovers from the coronavirus pandemic. American children have spent the last year indoors and been deprived of normal childhood experiences such as school field trips and family vacations. There is a palpable desire among families and their young kids to get outdoors. This program will encourage them to do so, promoting our economic recovery in the process. In 2019, visitor spending in communities near national parks resulted in a \$41.7 billion benefit to the nation's economy and supported 340,500 jobs.² From 2015 to 2019, visitor spending increased by \$4.1 billion and the effect on the U.S. economy grew by \$9.7 billion. We must continue to drive this trend as we exit the coronavirus pandemic.

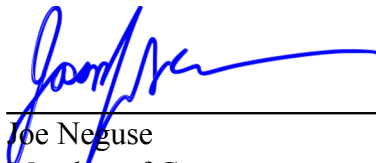
Writer and historian Wallace Stegner called national parks "the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst." Few programs embody that ethos more than Every Kid Outdoors, and we strongly urge you to provide **\$25 million for the National Park Service Every Kid Outdoors program** for the 2024 Fiscal Year. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Katie Porter
Member of Congress

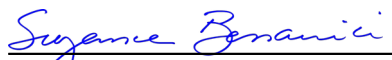


Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

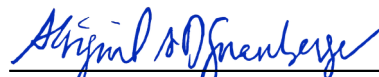


Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

² The National Park Service. "National Park Service Visitor Spending Generates Economic Impact of More Than \$41 Billion." June 11, 2020. Retrieved at: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/06-11-20-nps-visitor-spending-generates-economic-impact-of-more-than-41-billion.htm>



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