



May 21, 2020

Chairman Peter Defazio
2165 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Sam Graves
2165 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for HR 5797 "The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Full Funding Act of 2020"

Dear Chairman Defazio and Ranking Member Graves:

Please accept this correspondence as the vigorous support of the Organizations above for HR 5797 "The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Full Funding Act of 2020" ("The Proposal"). Prior to addressing our support for the Proposal, we believe a brief summary of each Organization is needed. The Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition ("COHVCO") is a grassroots advocacy organization of approximately 250,000 registered OHV users in Colorado seeking to represent, assist, educate, and empower all OHV recreationists in the protection and promotion of off-highway motorized recreation throughout Colorado. COHVCO is an environmental organization that advocates and promotes the responsible use and conservation of our public lands and natural resources to preserve their aesthetic and recreational qualities for future generations. The Trail Preservation Alliance ("TPA") is a 100 percent volunteer organization whose intention is to be a viable partner, working with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to preserve the sport of trail riding. The TPA acts as an advocate of the sport and takes the necessary action to ensure that the USFS and BLM allocate to trail riding a fair and equitable percentage of access to public lands. Colorado Snowmobile Association ("CSA") was founded in 1970 to unite the more than 30,000 winter motorized recreationists across the state to enjoy their passion. CSA has also become the voice of organized snowmobiling seeking to advance,

promote and preserve the sport of snowmobiling through work with Federal and state land management agencies and local, state and federal legislators telling the truth about our sport. The Idaho Recreation Council ("IRC") is a recognized, statewide, collaboration of Idaho recreation enthusiasts and others that will identify and work together on recreation issues in cooperation with land managers, legislators and the public to ensure a positive future for responsible outdoor recreation access for everyone, now and into the future. For purposes of this correspondence TPA, COHVCO, CSA, and IRC will be referred to as "The Organizations".

We are writing to request that HR 5797, "The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Full Funding Act of 2020" sponsored by Congressman Welch of VT and Congressman Curtis of UT be included in the transportation reauthorization bill currently being drafted in your committee. Without Congressional approval before September 30th, the program is at risk of going dormant, creating a huge void for recreational trail development and maintenance funding.

A. RTP funding is a catalyst for significant matching of funding from outside sources.

For more than a quarter-century the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) has been the key source of funding for recreational trails across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Based on the "user-pay, user-benefit" model of the Highway Trust Fund, the RTP is funded from gas taxes paid by nonhighway recreational vehicles. The RTP is currently funded at \$84 million annually but it is estimated that federal gas taxes paid by nonhighway recreational vehicles amounts to more than \$270 million annually. HR 5797 would correct this inequity and return more of the gas tax dollars for off-road recreation and be directing this funding to hugely successful programs that could direct this money immediately on to the ground for the benefit of all recreational uses. The Organizations are also intimately aware that often small amounts of RTP funding are major catalysts for matching efforts from partners on projects.

In Colorado, the Organizations are intimately familiar with the benefits of the RTP program as our RTP monies are pooled with the voluntary registration program funds from OHV registrations through Colorado Parks and Wildlife Trails Program. As you are aware, most states do not apply RTP monies in this way but rather administer the RTP program through their Department of Transportation. The Organizations note these programmatic differences not to assert one administration model is better than another but rather to allow you to understand why we are able to identify these benefits so clearly. The result of this programmatic leveraging in Colorado is the approximately \$1.5 million in funding currently

provided through RTP becomes more than \$6 million in funding on the ground. While this leveraging significantly magnifies the impacts of the RTP program, funding of multiple use recreational access still falls well short of the funding needs on the ground, as we are facing unprecedented challenges such as poor forest health, in many of the recreational areas throughout the western United States. The existing RTP funding is critical in providing basic maintenance of trails throughout the State of Colorado and fully funding the RTP program would allow these maintenance efforts to significantly expand almost immediately for all types of usages. It has been our experience that the RTP model of funding provides the most flexibility in use of these monies, while LWCF monies have more restrictions in their funding and sometimes remain unused as a result. The flexibility of the funding in the RTP program is a major reason we are asking for the program to be fully funded. This funding is the easiest and fastest money to be able to use and provides basic safety for all users of these recreational opportunities as maintained trails are safe trails.

In Idaho, similar leveraging of RTP funding without registration based funding occurs consistently as well as Idaho administers the RTP program in conjunction with their user registration program. We would like to highlight three projects where RTP money was leveraged with registration funds and projects were able to undertaken that are much larger in scale than could ever be undertaken with RTP money alone.

1. Bear Valley Lakes National Recreation Trail Heavy Maintenance

This project completed significant maintenance on the Bear Valley Lakes National Recreation Trail, a motorized single-track trail in the Salmon-Challis National Forest. Lemhi County, the project sponsor, was awarded an RTP grant of \$27,920 with \$9,405 in matching funds. The trail was cleared of trees and rocks, the trail tread was maintained, and areas with erosion and drainage issues were addressed to improve the riding experience and reduce stream sedimentation. The county, along with the Youth Employment Program, US Forest Service staff and volunteers from a local user group completed the project.

2. Beaver Creek Trail Reroute

This current project in the Sawtooth National Forest was awarded \$43,000 in RTP funds with a match of \$30,000. A major component of the project is re-opening the Beaver Creek Trail. This motorized single-track trail has been impacted by recent fires and flooding, and the grant is funding crews and materials to reroute and reconstruct the trail to allow better motorized accessibility. The grant also provides funding for crews to clear and maintain Off-Highway Vehicle trails in the district to continue to provide OHV access.

The project is being completed by US Forest Service Staff, local motorized user groups, and contracted trail crews.

3. Upper Boardman Creek Trail Bridge Replacement

This recently funded project will replace a trail bridge crossing Boardman Creek in the Sawtooth National Forest. This bridge, recently closed due to its unsafe condition, is located at a popular access point for more than 150 miles of trails in the area. It is also 100 yards up the trail from a trail bridge constructed in 2014 using RTP funds that spans the South Fork of the Boise River. This project benefits single-track motorized trail users and will be completed by the US Forest Service in the summer of 2020. The Forest Service was awarded \$28,500 in RTP grant funding, with a match of \$7,500.

The Organizations submit that fully funding of RTP would trigger far larger amounts of matching and leveraging of funds from outside sources. Often partner and outside funding continues well beyond the matching capacity of RTP money, but the lack of RTP funding to focus these efforts around means this money may not be as fully utilized as it could be. The RTP is always a catalyst for efforts and the Organizations vigorously submit that a fully funded RTP program would create benefits on the ground from this increased leveraging of funding that would far exceed the value of the increase in RTP funding.

It is worth noting that the RTP provides funding for motorized and non-motorized trails alike and is administered by the states who select the projects to fund. By law, 30% of the funding goes to motorized trails, 30% goes to non-motorized trails, and 40% goes to mixed-use trails in the states. The Organizations are intimately aware that a loss of the RTP program funding would directly negatively impact our efforts but the Organizations do not rely exclusively on RTP monies to operate. The same cannot be said of other large groups of recreational users. Without RTP funding the non-motorized portions of the CPW Trails program simply would cease to function as there is no other source of funding available for these efforts.

B. Economic benefits and jobs from the RTP program are more important than ever with the challenges from COVID.

The Organizations are aware there is not the high level of controversy around the RTP program that there has been with the several stimulus bills that have been passed in response to COVID. RTP funds, leveraged with registration monies, provide direct funding which is important to the long-term economic recovery of the country from the COVID. In Colorado this funding hires more than 400 seasonal employees for

shovel ready maintenance projects protecting natural resources, through federal, state and local agencies. The Organizations could not envision a more effective manner to provide economic stimulus than this, as these jobs are critically sought after in these times of unprecedented unemployment throughout the Country. Unprecedented unemployment has resulted in many positions receiving dozens of applicants, instead of being difficult to fill. This is a clear indication of the challenges Americans in Colorado are facing in providing basic resources. Failing to hire these 400 people would be in addition to the CPW staff salaries reflected in the cash fund balance and these staff would be the first employees within CPW to have experienced any job loss as part of the COVID response. Without these funds, these 400 plus people will not be hired. Again, these factors weigh in favor of allocating existing funds faster rather than rescinding funding.

These employees and related volunteer support for these programs results in almost 60 dedicated and well-equipped maintenance crews providing recreational access to public lands throughout the year. Last year these crews cut more than 12,000 dead trees off the trail network in the state. While this is an impressive number of trees cut, in many areas this is insufficient to maintain access due to the huge number of dead trees in many areas. More funding is critically needed to maintain recreational opportunities.

The economic contributions that result from this funding are exemplified by the fact that the \$1.3 million in combined RTP funding and user registration monies from the snowmobile community allows for a vigorous winter backcountry recreational community in Colorado. In 2017, the Dept of Commerce estimated the economic contribution from this recreational activity to be more than \$475 million dollars. The Organizations submit that with the challenges being faced in the post-COVID response, benefits such as this are more important than ever.

Thank you for your consideration. It is absolutely critical that HR 5797 be included in the upcoming transportation reauthorization bill.

Respectfully Submitted,



Scott Jones, Esq.
CSA Executive Director
IRC, TPA & COHVCO Authorized Representative