

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221 U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Cc: Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and Senate Budget Committee

June 29, 2021

Dear Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell,

On behalf of the more than 100 undersigned organizations from across the nation, we urge you to prioritize robust investments in programs that protect and restore America's iconic aquatic ecosystems as part of any infrastructure or economic recovery package. At a time when lawmakers need to make targeted decisions to jumpstart our nation's economy and build more resilient communities, restoring America's great waters, which are a vital part of our nation's infrastructure, offers one of the best returns on investment.

From the Everglades to the Chesapeake Bay and the Great Lakes to the Puget Sound, there are many iconic aquatic ecosystems across the nation that have associated restoration plans administered by the Environmental Protection Agency, Army Corps of Engineers, or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These ecosystem restoration programs and plans were carefully crafted based upon the best available science and with extensive public input. They enjoy broad, bipartisan support, and their success hinges on the construction and maintenance of shovel-worthy infrastructure projects, many of which have long been on the books. Current funding is not enough to meet the need or potential of restoration efforts. Increasing resources for these widely supported and carefully crafted regional restoration programs is among the smartest and most strategic investments we can make as a nation to create jobs, support regional economies, protect natural resources, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and make our roads, bridges, water systems, and communities more resilient.

There are also critical watersheds – such as the Ohio River and the Mississippi River and delta – where restoration plans exist or are currently under development at the state or regional level. These “working” watersheds are also home to many low-income and vulnerable communities, who suffer firsthand as a result from the degradation and pollution of these rivers and surrounding floodplains. Directing stimulus dollars to expedite and expand the restoration efforts in these and similar systems creates jobs, improves water quality, and decreases future flood risk to surrounding communities.

The economic benefits of investing in aquatic ecosystem restoration are significant. Implementing these plans creates thousands of good-paying jobs through the on-the-ground work needed to restore our nationally significant lakes, rivers, and estuaries. For example, the EPA's National Estuary Program, with 28 sites around the nation, leverages \$22 on average in local, state and private sector investment for every \$1 of federal funds appropriated to the program. Advancing the implementation of the inter-agency Great Lakes Restoration Initiative creates at

least a 3-to-1 return on investment in local communities, from new real estate and commercial development to boosting outdoor recreation and tourism across the Great Lakes region. Completing the restoration milestones outlined in the plan to restore the Everglades will create over 65,000 quality jobs and yields a 4 to 1 return on investment.

Furthermore, millions of Americans rely on these watersheds for their drinking water supply. More than 13 million people rely on clean drinking water from the Delaware River watershed, including residents of New York City, Philadelphia, Trenton, Camden, and Wilmington – areas exhibiting high unemployment rates due to COVID-19. Great Lakes restoration efforts help protect the drinking water for over 30 million Americans and the Everglades supply the drinking water to 9 million people. Investing in these natural systems helps lower water treatment costs by naturally filtering and cleaning drinking water supplies.

Frontloading investment in these resilience-building programs also makes sense from a fiscal and community health perspective. The pandemic has already set back progress towards ecosystem restoration goals in some places, such as the Chesapeake Bay watershed where it delayed implementation of conservation practices on farms and the implementation of stormwater practices in urban areas. Delays in construction and implementation ultimately make the required restoration more expensive in the future and have significant environmental and public health impacts, like recurring harmful algal blooms, poor water quality for drinking, swimming, and fishing, and degradation of natural features providing protection in the face of increasing natural hazard events, including floods, hurricanes, and drought. For instance, according to the federal government's own estimates, investing more now to complete Everglades restoration instead of waiting decades could save American taxpayers over \$2 billion on the overall cost of restoration, and can accelerate efforts to address the toxic algal outbreaks that plague Atlantic and Gulf coastal communities year after year.

As our nation continues to recover and rebuild, we call on Congress to increase investments in regional watershed restoration programs at EPA, Army Corps, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to make communities and our natural resources more resilient in the face of climate change, boost local economies, filter drinking water, support fish and wildlife, increase property values, and create jobs. Accelerating the progress of restoration in these beloved ecosystems around the nation is a strategic way to put people to work quickly, and to create significant additional benefits for communities.

Thank you for considering our views, and we stand ready to assist you in this work.

Sincerely,

1000 Friends of Florida  
Advocates for Clean & Clear Waterways  
Alabama Rivers Alliance  
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary  
Partnership  
Alice Ferguson Foundation  
American Chestnut Land Trust

American Rivers  
American Sportfishing Association  
Amigos Bravos  
Angler Action Foundation  
Anthropocene Alliance  
Association of National Estuary Programs  
Audubon Florida

Audubon Mid-Atlantic  
Audubon Naturalist Society  
Audubon of Southwest Florida  
Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Inc.  
Blue Water Baltimore  
Buzzards Bay Coalition  
Capital Region Land Conservancy  
Catskill Center for Conservation and  
Development  
Chesapeake Conservancy  
Chesapeake Legal Alliance  
Citizens Against Widening the Industrial  
Canal  
Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana  
Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program -  
Texas  
Committee on the Middle Fork Vermilion  
River  
Delaware Audubon Society  
Delaware Highlands Conservancy  
Delaware Nature Society  
Delaware Riverkeeper Network  
Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society  
Ducks Unlimited  
Earth Force  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Environmental Law & Policy Center  
Everglades Foundation  
Flint River Watershed Coalition  
Florida Bay Forever  
Florida Oceanographic Society  
Florida Wildlife Federation  
Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space  
Friends of St Clements Bay  
Friends of the Cacapon River  
Friends of the Rappahannock  
Friends of the Rivers of Virginia  
Friends of the Upper Delaware River  
Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association  
Green Valleys Watershed Association  
Healthy Gulf  
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC  
Hoosier Environmental Council  
Huron River Watershed Council  
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited

IRL Council and Indian River Lagoon  
National Estuary Program  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Kentucky Resources Council  
Kentucky Waterways Alliance  
Lackawanna River Conservation  
Association  
Lake Erie Advocates  
Lake Hopatcong Foundation  
League of Conservation Voters  
Lehigh Valley Audubon Society  
Mill Creek Alliance  
Minnesota Environmental Partnership  
Musconetcong Watershed Association  
National Aquarium  
National Audubon Society  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Wildlife Federation  
New Jersey Sustainable Business Council  
Newtown Creek Coalition  
NYenvironcom  
Ohio Conservation Federation  
Ohio River Foundation  
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition  
Orange County Audubon Society  
Otsego Land Trust  
Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust  
Peace River Audubon  
Peconic Estuary Partnership, Citizens  
Advisory Committee  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches  
Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust  
Pocono Heritage Land Trust  
Potomac Conservancy  
Potomac Valley Audubon Society  
Puget Sound Partnership  
Rachel Carson Council  
Redbudsuds  
Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes  
Rivanna Conservation Alliance  
Rock Creek Conservancy  
Safe Healthy Playing Fields Inc  
Sanibel Captiva Conservation Foundation  
Save Our Wild Salmon Coalition  
Save The River  
Schuylkill Headwaters Association, Inc.

SERCAP, INC.  
Sierra Club  
Sierra Club Alabama Chapter Mobile Bay  
Group  
Surfrider Foundation  
The Alliance for the Great Lakes  
The Bay Foundation  
The Piedmont Environmental Council  
The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay  
The Wetland Trust, Inc.  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation  
Partnership  
Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council  
Transition Howard County  
Trout Unlimited  
UC Davis  
UrbanPromise Ministries  
Valley Forge Audubon Society  
Valley Watch, Inc.  
Virginia Conservation Network  
West Virginia Rivers Coalition  
Western Pocono Trout Unlimited