

Appalachian Mountain Club Talking Points for America's Great Outdoors Initiative

In April 2010, President Barack Obama announced the America's Great Outdoors Initiative with a call for interagency collaboration to develop a conservation and recreation agenda worthy of the 21st century. The President hopes that by creating better connections between recreational resources and renewing Americans' relationship with the outdoors, we will, as a nation, provide better protection for the national treasures we have in our trails, waters, farms, forests and parks.

For over 130 years, the Appalachian Mountain Club has brought people of all ages into the outdoors so they could learn about and appreciate our natural world and ultimately become stewards and advocates for the places we love. The close alignment between the America's Great Outdoors Initiative and AMC's mission makes us a natural participant and partner to share our experiences, lessons, successes and idea.

Public listening sessions are being held at venues around the country and comments are being collected online. AMC encourages its members and partners to attend the listening sessions and submit comments online, and offers the following points to mention:

- **Fully Fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund**

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a visionary and bipartisan program established in 1964 to create parks and open spaces, protect wilderness, wetlands, and refuges, preserve wildlife habitat, and enhance recreational opportunities. It "authorizes" (but does not require) Congress to spend up to \$900 million annually to conserve lands, forests, trails and local parks across the nation. The program has been fully funded only once in its 45-year history. Funding for LWCF comes from a portion offshore drilling lease revenues.

The LWCF is responsible for protecting many of our favorite recreational areas from Hibernia County Park, to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area to Acadia National Park. Many of AMC's leaders and members love to recreate in places that were protected by the LWCF.

- **Enhance Recreational Access & Infrastructure**

The United States offers unparalleled opportunities for people to experience natural attractions both at a distance and close to home. Just as we value the lands and waters themselves, we must also plan for their best use both in terms of how we care for them and in how people reach their gates. Financial support for the creating and caring for recreational trails and water access is a necessary component of reconnecting people to the outdoors. Other specific suggestions include:

- Increase support for the Recreational Trails Program, which supports local trails through grants administered by the Federal Highway Administration and each state.
- Reduce reliance on individual automobiles by planning both recreation and transportation infrastructure that allow easy access and connectivity by walking, cycling, and public transportation.

- Explore new ways to provide cost-share grants to local groups and leverage local efforts and resources in providing recreational access and trails.
 - Provide technical assistance through programs like the NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program.
- **Look to creative models for recognizing and protecting critical natural and recreational resources**
 Examples from the AMC region exemplifying creative partnerships include:
 - The Mid-Atlantic Highlands Region (CT, NY, NJ, PA). Efforts were sparked by USDA research of the region's resources. The Highlands Conservation Act officially designated and recognized the Highlands as nationally significant, prioritized the region for federal funding for conservation conducted through public-private partnerships.
 - The New England National Scenic Trail (MA, CT) recently designated based on a new model for partnership with NPS for supporting management and trail protection.
 - The Mahoosucs Initiative (NH, ME) is a community-based partnership to create and implement a vision for economic, recreational, and ecological well being of this region connected to the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge, the White Mountain Forest, and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.
 - The emerging Keeping Maine's Forest vision to maintain the environmental and economic integrity of the Maine Woods through a matrix of public land, private land permanently protected through conservation easement and long term agreements for habitat conservation. This matrix will help assure the vitality and competitiveness of the forest products industry, sustain a healthy and intact forest, protect valuable habitat and provide for public recreation.
 - **Foster hands-on environmental education to connect youth with the outdoors**
 AMC believes that fostering a connection with nature among today's youth is a necessary component in building the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts and conservationists. The Boston Youth Environmental Network reports that hands-on environmental education builds a closer connection between students and their surroundings and helps foster environmental stewardship. Environmental education should be integrated with classroom curriculum through avenues such as the No Child Left Inside Act. Building on AMC's work in youth outdoor education and similar efforts around the, schools should be connected to non-formal educators to help provide lasting outdoor experiences for youth.