



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

June 3, 2020

The Honorable Robert J. Portman
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mark R. Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Cory S. Gardner
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable A. Lamar Alexander Jr.
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Joseph Manchin III
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard M. Burr
217 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steven D. Daines
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Angus S. King Jr.
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators:

The Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422) is an important bipartisan bill that protects public lands and furthers the common good. I write in support of this legislation that achieves two important goals: full annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and a \$9.5 billion investment to address deferred maintenance at national parks and public lands.

Catholic teaching recognizes the earth as a shared inheritance destined for all mankind. This spirit of intergenerational solidarity and justice calls for God's ecological gifts to be extended to future generations. In his encyclical "[On care for our common home](#)," Pope Francis emphasized the Old Testament teachings that "tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15) [where] 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving" (*Laudato Si'*, no. 67). The federal government, as the steward of public lands, plays an essential role in 'keeping' the abundant resources of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of all people.

The LWCF receives \$900 million in annual royalties from oil and gas drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf. Although this revenue is intended for the conservation of national parks and public lands, large portions are repeatedly appropriated for other purposes. The Great American Outdoors Act grants full annual funding for LWCF, ensuring that these funds will be used to preserve the natural areas, wildlife habitats, and drinking water supplies that support life and form the unique identity of each place. This pragmatic model for consumption and conservation encourages the wise use of resources and safeguards the intrinsic order of creation.

The Great American Outdoors Act also creates opportunities for recreation and cultural education by addressing the maintenance backlog at national parks and public lands. Within our parks, cultural and historical landmarks are preserved alongside natural wonders. The Holy

Letter to Senate

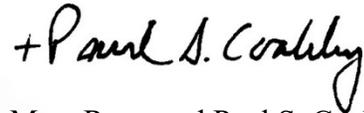
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Father has warned that “the disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of a plant or animal” (*Laudato Si'*, no. 145). Investments in infrastructure restoration improve access to these spaces and protect the natural and human ecologies that are essential for integral human development. Furthermore, improvements to infrastructure contribute to economic development critical for the rebuilding of America after the disruption caused by the pandemic.

As people of faith, we have a responsibility to build a better world for present and future generations. The Great American Outdoors Act enacts this vision, protecting the natural and cultural treasures of our country. Thank you for your bipartisan collaboration and leadership in caring for our common home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul S. Coakley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chair, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops