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Stakeholder Comments on “National Travel and Tourism Strategy”

American Forests is the oldest national non-profit conservation organization in the country, and it has been protecting and restoring urban and rural forests since being founded in 1875. American Forests has served as a catalyst for many of the most important milestones in the conservation movement; including the founding of the U.S. Forest Service, the national forest and national park systems, and thousands of forest ecosystem restoration projects and public education efforts. Since 1990, American Forests has planted nearly 40 million trees in forests throughout the U.S. and beyond, resulting in cleaner air and drinking water, restored habitat for wildlife and fish, and the removal of millions of tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

American Forests supports the use of our natural resources - forests, land, and water, as a way to promote recreational opportunities and tourism in the U.S. We believe that forests are for everyone to enjoy and that they are essential for increasing travel and tourism statistics in the United States. The travel and tourism sectors are critical drivers of our economy that provide jobs for many people in full-time and seasonal positions. Outdoor recreation also provides other benefits. In addition to creating jobs, outdoor recreation offers people a healthy alternative for vacationing and instills health and wellness values.

President Obama states in Executive Order 13597 that the U.S. has fallen behind in the amount of spending by international travellers, dropping from 17 to 11 percent of the global market from 2000 to 2010. With increased competition in the global tourism market, it is important for the U.S. to develop a marketable strategy for international tourism and travel. By promoting travel to our forests and natural landscapes to the tourism sector, the U.S. can provide a unique experience for international visitors. American Forests provides comments for the International Trade Administration’s Task Force on Travel and Competitiveness (“Task Force”) to help develop a National Travel and Tourism Strategy.

In Section 3, subsection (c) of the Executive Order, the Task Force is ordered to develop a National Travel and Tourism Strategy and provide recommendations for new policies and initiatives to increase travel to the U.S. This subsection lists lands, waters and shores as recommended travelling opportunities. American Forests supports this inclusion and is interested in promoting outdoor recreation policy initiatives. We hope that the Task Force prioritizes forests, lands, and water in their recommendations.

American Forests supports the Federal Government's efforts to improve the competitive position of the U.S. in the global travel and tourism markets. Taking advantage of our country's natural resources and landscapes is an economically and environmentally sound investment for the future of travel and tourism. In the short term (the next year), the Task Force can support increased outdoor recreation by building upon efforts that have already been displayed on several Federal platforms and programs.

The establishment of America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative indicates that outdoor recreation is a top priority for the Obama Administration. The AGO Initiative hopes to transform recreation policy from a top-down approach to a collaborative effort among the Federal Government, states, tribes, and local communities. The Administration is currently taking action to increase access and opportunities on federal lands and waters by expanding technical assistance to communities and creating an interagency Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation. The Let's Move Outside campaign, administered by the Department of Interior, also delivers an outdoor recreation message targeted towards a youth audience. American Forests supports these initiatives and suggests that they can be used as a platform for promoting outdoor recreation in the Task Force's National Travel and Tourism Strategy.

The Task Force can also strengthen their strategy by supporting federal programs that help fund outdoor recreation opportunities and maintenance. American Forests supports full funding for these programs to help both environmental conservation and outdoor recreation initiatives. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) works in partnership with state and local groups to improve outdoor recreation opportunities such as trails, waterways, hiking, hunting, and fishing. The fund also enhances access to other areas including wildlife refuges, national parks, and historic sites that are important to tourism. The Department of Transportation administers the Recreation Trails Program which provides funding for trail maintenance and the Transportation Enhancement Program which funds maintenance and beautification of bike trails, highways, and historic sites. The National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program provides funding to protect trails, parks and watersheds. Funding for the Forest Service's Legacy and Trails Remediation Initiative has helped create jobs that restore forests and wildlife habitat. The Bureau of Land Management's National Landscape Conservation System and the Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System offer a large range of unique recreation

opportunities that highlight. American Forests advocates for appropriate funding (that meets the President's FY 2013 budget proposal) for these outdoor recreation and conservation programs. We recommend that the Task Force also support these programs to enhance outdoor recreation in tourism sector. Full funding for these programs and systems can help create an outdoor recreation platform for the National Travel and Tourism Strategy.

As shown by the number of federal programs that fund outdoor recreation opportunities, the Task Force has several options for promoting outdoor recreation as part of their National Travel and Tourism Strategy. Fully funding these programs will ensure that our nation's parks, trails, waterways, and wildlife refuges are maintained and protected for future visitors.

In addition to fully funding recreation and conservation programs, it is important that the Task Force measure progress to ensure that these programs are helping to increase travel and tourism to the U.S. First, the Task Force should monitor and advocate for these programs in the appropriations process to see that they receive full funding requested in the FY 2013 budget. The Task Force can continue to work with federal agencies to monitor the number of visitors to national parks, wildlife refuges, and historic sites. The Task Force can also collaborate with local communities and non-profit organizations working on outdoor recreation to monitor the progress of increasing the amount of visitors and jobs created.

American Forests supports the International Trade Administration's efforts to promote the U.S. as a travel destination and encourages the inclusion of outdoor recreation opportunities and encouraging people to explore our nation's forests and waterways. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the National Travel and Tourism Strategy. Please feel free to contact American Forests should you have any questions regarding our comments.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Steen', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

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