WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE
Dear Secretary Perdue,

The Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council’s members (HSSCC) appreciate and recognize the critically important role that U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs play in conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat on America’s farms, ranches and forests. USDA conservation programming represents unparalleled opportunities to engage private landowners in conservation and producing a range of environmental benefits and significant benefits to wildlife.

With robust conservation programs authorized by Congress in the 2018 Farm Bill being implemented and with a variety of external forces including the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis impacting our farmers, ranchers and private forest owners, we believe there are abundant opportunities to leverage USDA authority to provide support to the Nation’s private landowners while also providing conservation benefits.

Specifically, the Council has identified the following opportunities:

1. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

We appreciate Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) announcement of 3.4 million acres enrolled in the recent general signup. While this was a very productive general sign-up, we also recognize that we will still be far below the national acreage cap and it will be very challenging to enroll enough acres to meet Congress’ statutory cap of 24.5 million by October 1, 2020 as provided for in the Farm Bill.

CRP represents a valuable tool in the conservation tool kit because it provides such a broad range of values. The program can be used by producers to enroll marginal cropland in times of low prices or other market uncertainties, provide valuable habitat across the country and spur the rural economy. In these difficult economic times for farmers and ranchers, the Council believes FSA should provide increased opportunities through CRP to help our Nation’s producers get through these difficult times.

The following are the Council’s recommendations on CRP:

- Provide for an emergency general sign-up in FY 20 to offer an extra opportunity for producers to enroll.
- Adjust rental rates, SIPS and PIPS for all CRP practices to ensure private landowners are fairly rewarded for their participation in voluntary conservation and the resultant public benefits.
• Utilize the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to authorize an emergency CRP-like program, with upfront payments for a short-term contract of three years to provide relief to farmers while providing wildlife habitat and other conservation outcomes.
• Adjust rental rates and eligible acres for greater flexibility for producers to optimize profitability across their operations through the SHIP program.
• Re-establish SAFE as an option for continuous sign-up.

2. Waterfowl & Wetlands

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) programing has become especially important to work with private landowners to conserve and enhance wetland and waterfowl habitat. Again, we perceive abundant opportunities to invest in key NRCS programming with the objectives of both providing needed support to producers while also yielding meaningful habitat outcomes. Specifically the Council has identified the following:

• Utilize new EQIP language in the 2018 Farm Bill to conserve both small prairie pothole wetlands and incentivize the flooding of post-harvest cropland in key wintering areas through a new Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative with funding of $50 million per year.
• Provide emergency funding in the amount of $50 million for the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program in the amount of $100 million. Management and enhancement of current easements could immediately put contractors to work. Meanwhile, in places like the lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley, demand far exceeds funding availability as demonstrated by an acceptance rate of only 10% of interested producers.

3. Soil Health/Cover Crops

Against the backdrop of record numbers of Prevent Plant (PP) claims in 2019, Congress took action to eliminate some of the structural impediments to utilize cover crops on idled acres. While this action significantly enhanced the opportunities for producers to utilize cover crops to aid in soil health, more action from USDA is needed to make cover crops a viable management tool for farmers. Cover crops not only aid in soil health but also can play a significant role in enhancing water quality and in some instances provide valuable wildlife habitat.

The Council is suggesting the following:

• Provide increased flexibility for planting, harvesting, and grazing cover crops on prevented plant acres by making the changes outlined in the bipartisan Cover Crop Flexibility Act of 2020 (S. 3479). These changes are a win-win for farmers and conservation and will provide more options of farmers who are dealing with bad weather on top of the Covid crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of our perspective and seeking new and expanded opportunities to support our Nation’s farmers through these difficult times while also providing
myriad habitat, wildlife and public benefit. Should you have questions or need additional information regarding this matter, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or at (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,
Dear Secretary Bernhardt and Secretary Perdue:

The Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council continues to recognize that Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) as a serious threat to deer, elk, and moose in North America. As such, CWD threatens the hunting traditions that rely on healthy populations of those species as well as the billions of dollars in associated economic contributions. Since our initial correspondence in October 2018, CWD has intensified in established areas and spread to additional counties and states. Therefore, all involved partners including federal agencies, state agencies, congress, and others must ramp up our efforts and do everything we can to limit its spread of this growing wildlife crisis and its associated detrimental impacts.

During our May 7, 2020 virtual meeting, the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council (Council) discussed the major threats and impacts that CWD poses, our previous recommendations, and response, as well as ongoing needs. Council members expressed significant disappointment in USDA’s response to previous recommendations, all of which remain relevant today.

The Council understands the enormous challenges that this disease poses to wildlife health specialist and managers across the country and beyond. However, we continue to view the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior as leaders in this challenge. As such, we offer the following updated recommendations.

The Council continues to recognize that regulating federal and state agencies must facilitate interagency cooperation, especially between USDA, DOI, states and others regarding CWD research, education and management. This is especially critical regarding the nexus between captive and wild cervids and the complex regulatory structures involved. We applaud DOI’s establishment of an inter-agency team including representatives from FWS, NPS, USGS, BLM, ASFWP, and ASWS. To date, we understand that this team has reached out to states and USDA, is developing a charter, and reviewing actions taken by bureaus. While commendable, it is paramount that USDA equally engage and embrace or co-lead this collaborative effort to be effective. Recommendation:

The Council encourages expansion and further development of a dedicated CWD working group within USDA and DOI (APHIS, USGS, FWS and NRCS) to facilitate cooperation between state and federal agencies regarding captive and wild cervids. This task force should complete facilitation and memorialize strong CWD collaboration between USDA, USDI, state wildlife agencies and others. This working group also should thoroughly review ongoing efforts and policies and advise USDA APHIS and the Council on key CWD issues and response.

The national CWD herd certification program of USDA-APHIS remains a critical component of the containment strategy. The Council is unaware of any previous, ongoing or planned external review of CWD Program Standards as initially requested. Because of previously articulated concerns exemplifying the program’s shortcomings, including standards that are not consistent with the stated program goals
and multiple examples of documented interstate shipment of CWD-positive deer from herds certified as ‘low risk’ for CWD, we again ask for an external review of program standards. Recommendation:

The Council requests an external scientific review of the USDA APHIS CWD Herd Certification Program (HCP) and accompanying Program Standards to identify gaps in effectiveness and measures to improve the strength of, and confidence in, the HCP. A moratorium on the interstate movement of cervids is recommended pending results of the third-party review.

Funding still remains a critical need for research, monitoring and education. We must aggressively seek to address basic epidemiologic and transmission questions if we are to be successful battling this disease. State wildlife agencies also lack adequate resources to effectively monitor and manage this disease and the engage the public. Federal resources are needed that would provide funding to state and tribal agencies to develop and implement management strategies to effectively manage the disease and combat its increasing spread. Research funding is also needed to investigate CWD detection in pre-and post-mortem circumstances, in addition to strategies for limiting the spread of the disease. As funding becomes available, it should be efficiently distributed post-haste to states and other partners for appropriated uses. To date, funding allocated in 2019 for CWD through USDA has been neither allocated or distributed per its intended congressional purpose. Recommendations:

The Council asks that DOI and USDA seek and support legislation that would provide financial resources for CWD research, management and education as well as increase funding levels within USDA and DOI for CWD across relevant agency line items.

The Council requests that USDA expedite allocation and delivery of previously appropriated CWD funds to state wildlife agencies for its intended purpose.

We remain hopeful that these recommendations from the hunting and shooting sports community on resonate and request your timely consideration of the enclosed recommendations. We look forward to hearing from you regarding an encouraging response.

Sincerely,
The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20420  

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

The members of the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council Federal Advisory Committee cannot overstate our appreciation for your continued and unwavering support for policy priorities important to the sportsmen and women we represent. We are also deeply appreciative of your responsiveness to the recommendations of the HSSCC and the many actions the Department has taken to achieve our shared goals to perpetuate the traditions of hunting and shooting.

For example, following the submittal of the HSSCC’s letter recommending the appropriate utilization of the Backcountry Conservation Area (BCA) planning tool, several BCAs have been integrated into the proposed alternatives for Bureau of Land Management Resource Management Plans (RMPs). Of particular note, we were very pleased to see BCAs in the proposed alternatives for the Missoula, Lewistown and Four Rivers proposed RMPs. Thank you for your personal and direct involvement in delivering those outstanding outcomes.

In addition to expressing our gratitude, we are also writing to recommend relatively minor modifications to two proposed RMPs which, if adopted in the final RMPs, will build upon the many benefits the final RMPs will deliver on behalf of sportsmen and women and wildlife.

**Lewistown**

Because the first BCAs will serve as a model for subsequent planning processes, we believe it is important that the initial areas be adopted with care to ensure that the management objectives of BCAs are achieved. These include promoting public access to support wildlife-dependent recreation and hunting opportunities and facilitating the long-term maintenance of big game populations in areas that are primarily contiguous and intact.

To that end, we believe the BLM has done a commendable job of developing the first BCAs, and we are particularly supportive of the Four Rivers proposed Bennett Hills BCA. We view it as an exemplary proposal that should be used as a model for other planning efforts.

As proposed, the Bennett Hills BCA would include activities such as active forest and rangeland management, grazing, motorized access on designated routes and other areas for game retrieval, fluid and solids leasable minerals, and other actions consistent with the BLM’s multiple use, sustained yield mission. The Bennett Hills BCA would also be managed through Visual Resource Management Class II, to retain the existing character of the land to facilitate a high-quality hunting experience, and development activities would be cited in such a way to be compatible with the area’s wildlife and recreation values. To help achieve this, the Four Rivers
DRMP proposes that the Bennett Hills BCA be managed for wind and solar energy exclusion and that renewable developments be cited elsewhere in the field office.

We believe that this renewable energy allocation is appropriate in the Bennett Hills area of Idaho’s Unit 45, which is one of the premier trophy mule deer units in the nation, and where development associated with renewables is incompatible with the management objectives of this BCA.

Along those same lines, we recommend that the Department and BLM consider a similar wind energy exclusion allocation for adoption in the Crooked Creek and Arrow Creek proposed BCAs in the final Lewistown RMP. This area of Montana – FWP Hunting Districts 410 and 417 – and these proposed BCAs in particular, offer some of the finest elk and mule deer hunting anywhere. This change would further strengthen what are otherwise well-developed BCAs for Lewistown and help ensure that this management tool is successful applied, where appropriate, through future BLM planning processes.

Collar Gulch

We would also like to express our interest in Collar Gulch, a unique mountain stream in the Judith Mountains in central Montana that contains the easternmost, genetically pure strain of westslope cutthroat trout on the continent. Genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout have been lost from 92% of their historic habitat. It’s worse in central Montana where only 4% remains, making populations like Collar Gulch even more important to serve as donors to restore populations in other suitable streams. The Judith Mountains are also vital habitat for deer and elk, with the Judith Mountains being a limited entry elk hunting opportunity and Collar Gulch providing winter range for mule deer. Additionally, the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks’ Crucial Areas Planning System ranks the area as high priority crucial habitat.

Because of the importance for fish and wildlife, Collar Gulch is currently managed by the BLM Lewistown Field Office as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). However, the BLM’s proposed RMP would remove the ACEC status from Collar Gulch and eliminate the special management emphasis that is currently provided to the stream and fishery. Under the proposal, this unique fishery and important wildlife habitat would become more vulnerable to detrimental impacts.

An ACEC would not preclude multiple uses, meaning that grazing, forest management and resource extraction could still occur, but the intensity of those uses would be designed to conserve unique fish and wildlife resources in Collar Gulch. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has recommended that the BLM maintain ACEC management for Collar Gulch to ensure that degradation of stream habitat and water quality from surface disturbing activities would not occur. We concur and respectfully recommend that BLM manage 2,700 acres as the Collar Gulch ACEC as proposed in Alternatives B and D of the Lewistown proposed RMP. This is a relatively small area – approximately 0.4% of the public lands in the field office – and this action would have significant conservation value and result in enhanced and expanded hunting and fishing opportunities, while not resulting in increased conflict.
Recreational Shooting

Under the heading Public Safety on page 3.5.3, the FEIS states that “The BLM is required to address abandoned mines, target shooting, unexploded ordnance, mass movement, hazardous waste and other public hazards.” There is no explanation as to why the BLM has added a recreational activity that has historic and legitimate ties to public lands on a list of public hazards. If the BLM were treating target shooting as a public hazard, it would not be able to justify keeping federal public lands open to target shooting as it is proposing to do in the proposed alternative. We strongly recommend that target shooting be removed from this list in the final RMP.

Thank you very much in advance for your consideration of these recommendations and for your tireless service on behalf of America’s sportsmen and women, fish and wildlife and hunting heritage.

Sincerely,

Jeff Crane
Chairman
SHOOTING COMMITTEE
The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

The Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council is most appreciative of your response of April 21st to our letter of January 10th. The Council expressed concern over the potential application of the definition of "target range" in the Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act (Training Act) to the implementation of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (Recreation Act), which prohibits the development of shooting ranges in certain specified areas of federal lands. Unfortunately, the Recreation Act did not define the term "shooting range" and, as a result, raises the question as to how the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will define that term for the purposes of implementing the shooting range prohibition in Section 4104 of the Recreation Act.

The Council agrees that the terms target range and shooting range have long held the same ordinary meaning and that the terms have been interchangeable given that neither terms had been defined by regulation or statute until passage of the Training Act last year that defined the term target range, thus altering the common usage of these terms. As our letter to you noted, the statutory definition of target range was designed to be as broad in meaning as possible to allow the greatest flexibility in the use of Pittman-Robertson Act funding for the development of ranges to meet the growing need for these facilities within the hunting and shooting sports communities. However, captured within the definition of target range are areas "identified by a governmental agency for recreational shooting" meaning that anywhere on federal lands where areas are identified or designated for informal, dispersed shooting could be termed target ranges. It could also be argued that since USFS and BLM administered lands are "open unless closed" to a variety of activities, any area open to dispersed recreational shooting would fall under the Training Act's definition of target range, should that definition be used as the same ordinary meaning for shooting range in the implementation of Section 4104 of the Recreation Act.

The Council fully supports the broadest definition of target range as now set in statute, but as our letter of January 10th expressed, our concern arose with the passage of the Recreation Act because it does not define the term "shooting range" meaning that the Training Act's definition of a target range could be applied to the implementation of the Recreation Act, using the general view heretofore that these terms have the same ordinary meaning. However, we believe the outcome of using these terms interchangeably could result in the closure of informal, dispersed shooting in those areas listed in the Recreation Act as off limits to shooting range development that are currently open to informal, dispersed shooting on the grounds that these areas have been "identified by a governmental agency for recreational shooting" and thus fall under the definition of target range. There is no assurance that this will not happen. Hence, our request that both the
USFS and the BLM create a regulatory definition of shooting range for the purpose of implementing Section 4104 of the Recreation Act. We also encourage the USFS and the BLM, as sister multiple use land management agencies, to create one definition in the spirit of good governance and clarity to the recreational shooter and the shooting sports community as a whole.

The Council respectfully requests that discussions continue on this issue with the Department of Agriculture and the USFS given that we believe forest lands could be closed to recreational shooting by applying the statutory definition of target range to the implementation of the Recreation Act. It may be that the USFS is contemplating its own regulatory definition of shooting range, in lieu of what the Council proposed in its January 10th letter, and, if so, we would appreciate having the opportunity to discuss that as well. Should you have questions or need more information regarding these matters, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council’s Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,

cc: Secretary David Bernhardt, U.S. Department of the Interior
Mr. William Perry Pendley  
Deputy Director, Policy and Programs  
U.S. Bureau of Land Management  
1849 C Street  
Washington, D.C.  20249

Dear Mr. Pendley,

Thank you for your response to the January 10, 2020, letter of the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council regarding the definition of shooting ranges. The Council believes it essential to provide further clarification of its recommendation that the BLM develop a regulatory definition of "shooting range," in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), for the purpose of implementing the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (Dingell Act). Our concern is not focused on BLM public lands in general, but rather on those lands and land systems as enumerated in Section 4101 (b) Exception of the Dingell Act, including lands within the National Landscape Conservation System, where the "Secretary concerned shall not lease or permit the use of Federal land for a shooting range." The conundrum is that the Dingell Act did not define the term "shooting range."

The Council recognizes that the BLM has authority to establish shooting ranges on public lands when compatible with applicable laws and management plans. However, that authority was modified by passage of the Dingell Act that explicitly prohibits the establishment of shooting ranges on certain Federal lands and land systems. The Council, and the shooting sports community it represents, wholeheartedly agrees that the broadest definition of "shooting range" would provide the greatest flexibility to the BLM in permitting different types of facilities in order to meet agency management responsibilities and the needs of recreational shooters. Your response is also correct in stating that the BLM and the USFS were provided a recommended guideline of terms to cover the breadth of recreational shooting that occurs on Federal lands from informal, dispersed shooting to the most structured of shooting facilities. However, from the Council's perspective, the Dingell Act prohibition against shooting ranges on certain Federal lands, without providing a definition of the term, has altered that approach.

As noted in our January 10th letter, passage of the Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Act (Training Act) included, for the first time, a statutory definition of a range. However, the definition was termed a "target range." Until last year, there had been no regulatory or statutory definition of either a target range or shooting range, which terms until then were relatively interchangeable. Since the term "target range" is a broad definition of this type of recreational facility, we recommend that the BLM use that statutorily-defined term for its general management of recreational shooting. However, the target range definition presents a significant problem if it is used interchangeably with the term "shooting range" in the Dingell Act. Captured within the definition of target range are areas "identified by a governmental agency for recreational shooting." To the Council, this means that anywhere on Federal lands were areas are identified or designated for informal, dispersed shooting could be termed "target ranges."
Thus, Federal lands prohibited from the lease or permitted use of a shooting range, as enumerated in the Dingell Act, that are currently open to recreational shooting could be closed by application of the target range definition. In addition, it can be argued that since BLM-administered lands are statutorily "open unless closed," any lands open to dispersed recreational shooting would also fall under the target range definition. Thus, the Council recommends that a regulatory definition of "shooting range" be created specifically for the implementation of the Dingell Act, preferably one shared by the BLM and the USFS, so that the prohibition against establishing shooting ranges as specified in Section 4101 (b) is implemented as clearly and as narrowly as possible.

The offer to work with the Council and the USFS is appreciated and we gladly accept that offer. It is our desire to have this issue resolved before regulations are issued by both agencies for the implementation of the Dingell Act. Should you have questions or need more information regarding this matter, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council’s Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,

cc: Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt
    Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue
HUNTING COMMITTEE
Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

The members of the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council continue to be appreciative of the work done by the Fish and Wildlife Service leadership and staff to increase access and eliminate regulatory impediments to our nation’s citizens enjoyment of hunting and fishing on National wildlife refuges. We write today to bring to your attention an additional, appropriate improvement the Service should make in this regard.

Many states have passed laws and regulations that grant a disabled person the right to employ firearms not authorized for able-bodied hunters to use when taking game. A limited comparison of the Service’s annual National Wildlife Refuge System “Hunt Rule” to a sample of states with such laws suggests an inconsistent and incomprehensive reference to these state laws and regulations in the Hunt Rule.

We believe the Hunt Rule should provide for each refuge in a state, the same firearms allowance that the governing state law and regulations provide for disabled and able-bodied hunters. It is our belief that every case where disabled hunters may use a firearm not authorized for able bodied hunters, the purpose is to provide the disabled hunter with the latitude to employ the firearm best suited to their circumstance in order to better take game and enjoy the hunting experience.

We ask that the Service conduct a comprehensive review of state law and regulations that provide firearms options for disabled hunters not granted to able-bodied hunters and correspondingly update the Hunt Rule to be in congruence with these state laws and regulations within the respective Refuge station. We believe the Service will then be well positioned to update the Hunt Rule going forward as more states provide disabled hunters the ability to improve their hunting experience. Should you have questions or need additional information regarding our request, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or at (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely
The Honorable David Bernhard
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

On behalf of the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council (Council), I am writing in response to a letter dated February 4, 2020 that was sent to us by the National Park Service (NPS) following a Council recommendation submitted to you on December 20, 2019. Thank you for directing the NPS to respond to our request.

Since its inception, the Council has expressed an interest in working with the Department of the Interior on issues related to wildlife management in the National Park System. It was with this in mind that our December 20, 2019 letter recommended the adoption of a “Skilled Volunteer Analysis Template” intended to aid NPS superintendents in assessing the viability of implementing a skilled volunteer strategy to assist with wildlife management in a particular unit. The Council was pleased to see that the response to our recommendations included an attached memorandum dated July 31, 2019, stating that Parks should “always consider the use of volunteers in their wildlife management planning, and include this as a tool whenever possible.”

In addition, the July 31 memorandum included guidance directing superintendents to track the use of volunteers for wildlife management through a Google spreadsheet listing parks engaged in management efforts that also include the use of volunteers. Although the memorandum listed the URL needed to access this spreadsheet for review, the link appears to be inactive at this time, limiting the Council’s ability to review the status of this effort.

With this in mind, the Council would greatly appreciate the opportunity to review the latest iteration of the document referenced in the memorandum. Doing so would provide the Council with the ability to identify NPS units where wildlife management issues exist and also allow Council members to encourage public stakeholders to actively engage in planning efforts that may consider the use of skilled volunteers to address wildlife management concerns.

Again, thank you for your response to our recommendation and your continued engagement with the Council. Should you have questions or need additional information regarding our request, please contact Doug Hobbs, the Council Designated Federal Officer, at doug_hobbs@fws.gov or at (703) 358-2336.

Sincerely,
OUTREACH COMMITTEE
The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240  

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

The Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council (Council) appreciates the efforts of the Department of the Interior to make information available about opportunities for hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting on Department lands and waters through the Recreation.gov website (website). The website continues to serve as an informative place for the public about recreational opportunities on federal lands. During this current period of national efforts to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations, we see an opportunity for the website to inform the American public about ways it can continue to safely recreate on federal lands during the coronavirus epidemic.

We appreciate your leadership in working to keep public lands managed by the Department of the Interior open for public use during the coronavirus epidemic. We realize the challenges you face in coordinating efforts among federal staff, but also with state and local authorities. While recognizing the authority of state and local orders related to minimizing non-essential activities, we feel a general policy of maintaining open access to public lands will help families through this challenging time. Nature is an ideal place to keep safe distances among people while simultaneously allowing citizens educational and recreational experiences that provide health, and hope. Now, more than ever, Americans need to have the ability to access these lands for a variety of reasons, including hunting and fishing to provide food for their families.

In recent weeks, a number of conservation organizations have begun to communicate and encourage safe social distancing practices while enjoying the outdoors. The social media campaign known as #ResponsibleRecreation is underway to encourage the public to act responsibly, in accordance with the recommendations of public health officials, as they enjoy the outdoors. We see an opportunity for the federal land management agencies to support these efforts and expand awareness of ways to safely recreate through Recreation.gov, other agency webpages and social media channels by distributing information about how to responsibly and safely utilize public lands. Therefore, the Council recommends that the Department and its bureaus join the effort by utilizing #ResponsibleRecreation and the accompanying messaging associated with the campaign on the Recreation.gov website, and other websites and social media channels.

Thank you for your diligence in working to address our nation’s current health crisis and your consideration of this recommendation. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Council Designated Federal Officer Doug Hobbs at doug hobbs @fws.gov, or on (703) 358-2336.