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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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September 20, 2023

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

I write to urge you to use the authorities Congress granted you in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) to keep the national parks and other public lands open and accessible in the event of a government shutdown.

FLREA authorizes you to retain funds from the collection of fees and to use those funds for various purposes, including visitor access and services, public health and safety, and law enforcement related to public use and recreation. In previous years, it has been demonstrated that these funds can be successfully utilized to keep public lands open during a lapse in appropriations. During the December 2018-January 2019 shutdown, most of the national parks remained accessible to visitors because FLREA funds were available to cover costs associated with visitor services and law enforcement.

The National Park Service Organic Act established a dual mission of conserving park resources *and* providing for their enjoyment. As Secretary of the Interior, it is your responsibility to provide opportunities for people to access our parks in a way that ensures visitor health and safety, as well as providing the same opportunity for future generations. Both of these objectives can be accomplished through careful planning and coordination. To ensure that you are protecting public access to our public places and preventing any irreversible environmental degradation during a shutdown, I ask that you keep the parks and public lands open and accessible.

Your judicious management of FLREA fees will protect the millions of people who plan and save for trips to these special places, ensure that gateway communities that rely on park visitation for jobs and economic stability do not needlessly suffer, and sustain the dedicated National Park Service (NPS) employees who rely on a regular paycheck.

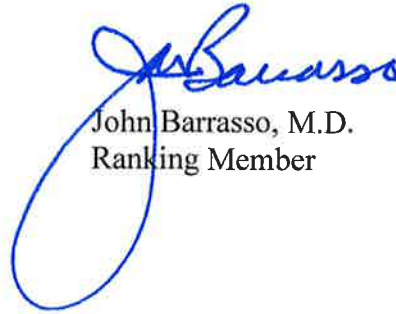
Also, please provide the following information no later than September 28.

- A current accounting of the FLREA funds available to ensure basic visitor services can be provided in the event of a lapse in appropriations.

- The National Park Service's Contingency Plan that provides for each park with available balances of FLREA funds to immediately utilize such funds to address the following items in a manner that maintains: restrooms and sanitation, trash collection, road maintenance, campground operations, law enforcement and emergency operations, and staffing entrance gates as necessary to provide critical safety information.
- A list of parks that do not charge fees or that have insufficient available balances, along with a proposed expenditure plan from available national and regional fee funds to address these challenges, consistent with the activities described above.

Thank you for your timely response.

Sincerely,



John Barrasso, M.D.
Ranking Member