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December 15, 2021

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitchell McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Thank you for your leadership on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This once-in-a-generation investment comes at a time when people across the country are struggling to combat the increasing severity of extreme weather, and there is an ever-increasing need for resilient infrastructure. We are especially pleased with the bipartisan provisions below that will help to bridge the digital divide, help to make communities flood-ready; improve the ability of our roads and bridges to withstand the growing threat of natural hazards; and enhance America's national parks, rivers, and wildlife migration corridors.

Broadband Access Initiative

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides an unprecedented investment in broadband infrastructure - \$65 billion for deployment devices, digital literacy, and affordability and will accelerate America's progress toward universal high-speed internet access. The legislation continues Congress' efforts to improve federal standards for speed, accountability, and equity in broadband. And, for the first time, Congress has empowered entities closest to the problem of insufficient and unaffordable broadband access—state and local governments—to solve it.

Disaster Resilience

The combined \$4.5 billion in funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program and the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program will significantly boost the ability of states and localities to undertake proactive measures that reduce the costly cycle of disaster damage and repair. Similarly, the \$8.7 billion devoted to a first-ever transportation disaster mitigation program, the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant program, will incentivize communities to assess, plan for, and reduce vulnerabilities to threats such as heavier downpours, sea level rise, and stronger storms. The long-term sustainability and performance of the nation's transportation assets will be further improved through the bill's incorporation of resilience into existing federal programs, such as the National Highway

Performance Program and Surface Transportation Block Grant Program. Importantly, the return-on-investment of these resilience provisions will be enhanced for communities nationwide as a result of natural infrastructure, such as the creation, preservation, or restoration of wetlands and rivers, being included among supported eligible activities.

Wildlife Crossings

The bill's establishment of a dedicated \$350 million wildlife crossing safety pilot program would make crucial investments in infrastructure to reduce or prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions on the nation's almost four million miles of federal highways. The bill also allows the Department of Transportation to update their research and data to support efforts at the state and local levels to lessen the impacts of these collisions and to prioritize the conservation of habitat connectivity projects.

National Parks

The funding for national park transportation programs will help rural communities adjacent to these special places by creating and supporting local construction jobs to rehabilitate and restore roads, tunnels, and bridges that host millions of visitors daily. For more than one hundred years, our national parks have provided the backbone for many rural communities, and, in 2020, 237 million park visitors spent an estimated \$14.5 billion in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands across the country. These expenditures supported a total of 234 thousand jobs, \$9.7 billion in labor income, \$16.7 billion in value added, and \$28.6 billion in economic output in the national economy.

Habitat Connectivity

Finally, the legislation will provide the resources to reconnect rivers, restore salmon populations, and uphold obligations to tribal governments throughout the Pacific Northwest, as well as improve fish passage for other species throughout the country.

Again, we thank you for the inclusion of these resiliency, parks, rivers, wildlife and broadband provisions in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. They constitute a practical and effective way to stimulate our economy, better prepare infrastructure and communities for extreme weather, and support rural jobs while reducing highway fatalities and conserving biodiversity on our lands and rivers.

Sincerely,

Marcia Argust
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The Pew Charitable Trusts

Laura Lightbody
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