

# FRIENDS of BLACKWATER

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March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019

The Honorable Joe Manchin III

United States Senate

306 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Manchin:

As conservation organizations dedicated to protecting our public lands and waters in West Virginia, we understand the importance of our shared open spaces, forests, and public lands. These places are not only important for protecting our outdoor heritage for future generations but are also vital to ensuring clean drinking water and a healthy environment to raise our families in. Because we value West Virginia's public lands, we are writing today to urge you to oppose the nomination of David Bernhardt for Secretary of the Interior.

We first want to thank you for your incredible leadership in ensure the passage of S. 47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. In a time of partisan gridlock, we are heartened to see this major conservation achievement. While this bill included many important conservation gains, we are especially excited to see the permanent authorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

The Conservation Fund is a major driver for the outdoor recreation economy and has invested more than \$243 Million into our state. This funding has gone into nearly every county in the state and has funded everything from developing local parks to expanding sportsmen access to public lands to purchasing land for access to support our world class whitewater rafting.

Despite passing the Senate 92 to 8 and the House 363 to 62, with the support of the entire West Virginia delegation, the Department of the Interior under the leadership of Acting Secretary David Bernhardt has proposed a 105% funding cut to the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We cannot over emphasize the devastating impact these cuts will have to the outdoor recreation economy and the public lands in our state. You led the effort to permanently authorize the Conservation Fund and now David Bernhardt is attempting to undermine this achievement by gutting the program.

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, the outdoor recreation economy in West Virginia supports 91,000 direct jobs and pays \$2.4 Billion in annual wages and salaries – not to mention the \$660 Million in state and local revenue. In fact, the outdoor recreation economy is growing faster than the overall economy, says the study from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis. These are jobs that can't be outsourced or exported to foreign countries and serve a vital role in diversifying West Virginia's economy.

A vote for David Bernhardt would be a vote against West Virginia's outdoor economy.

In addition, David Bernhardt has gone to extreme lengths to prevent the public's involvement in the decision-making process about their own public lands. From shortening public comment periods to making public input

optional instead of mandatory, David Bernhardt has continually put the objectives of out-of-state special interests over West Virginians.

You have continually spoken about the need to put partisan ideologies aside and come together to work for all Americans. We couldn't agree more. The partisan rancor in Washington is deafening and we do not need a former lobbyist who refuses to work in a bipartisan manner in charge of our public lands. We need someone who will work across party lines to confront the serious problems that threaten our public lands and waters. The clearly isn't David Bernhardt.

Our public lands are too important to play partisan politics with and the only reasonable way forward requires open-minded, reasonable leaders controlling agencies as large and as influential as the Interior Department.

We urge you to vote "NO" on the confirmation of David Bernhardt as Interior Secretary.

Sincerely,

Judy Rodd, Executive Director, Friends of Blackwater

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Sincerely,



Judith S. Rodd, Director Friends of Blackwater