Pollution-Free Communities, Lands, & Parks: Over 200,000 Good Jobs Each Year

The Problem: Fifty-three million people live within three miles of 1,836 “Superfund” sites – places contaminated by toxic pollution and hazardous waste, which pose disproportionate threats to communities of color. In addition, over 5 million people in Appalachia live within a mile of an abandoned coal mine with dangerous contamination. As we grapple with the COVID-19 crisis, such hazards only compound public health threats. While many of the places we live are contaminated with pollution, many of the places we love are disappearing or out of reach. Louisiana loses the equivalent of a football field of wetlands every 100 minutes, exposing Gulf Coast communities to increased climate risks. Meanwhile, the Trump administration is trying to dismantle protections for our public lands. Such protected areas also are too often inaccessible – fewer than half of all people in the U.S. live within walking distance of a park, as divided neighborhoods put the benefits of the outdoors out of reach for many low-income families and communities of color.

The Solution: We urgently need economic investments to protect the places we live and love. That means cleaning up toxic pollution at contaminated sites to support healthy communities. It means hiring local workers to restore our wetlands and forests. And it means investing in projects to improve our parks and support equitable access to the outdoors.

The Jobs: Essential investments in pollution-free communities, land restoration, and access to the outdoors, as detailed below, would provide over 226,000 good jobs per year. Click here for an economic analysis from the Political Economy Research Institute with a table (pg. 28) that details job creation estimates for these outdoors investments.

What Congress Needs to Do:

- **Provide nearly 100,000 jobs per year by cleaning up polluted communities**: Congress needs to invest $20 billion over five years for Superfund site cleanup to protect communities from toxic pollution, with funding set aside for workforce training and renewable energy development. In addition, Congress should invest $10 billion in the Brownfields program over five years to clean up contaminated sites in support of community-driven economic development, while protecting against community displacement.

- **Provide over 25,000 jobs per year by restoring our wetlands, forests, and parks**: Congress needs to invest $10 billion over 10 years to create a Stewardship Corps to hire local workers to restore forests, wetlands, and other ecosystems, as outlined in the Climate Stewardship Act. Congress also should fund the National Park Service’s Outdoor Recreation and Legacy Partnership program at $1 billion over 10 years to support park improvement projects that boost economic competitiveness, job training, and equitable access to the outdoors.

- **Provide over 13,000 jobs per year in Appalachia by restoring abandoned coal mines**: Congress needs to pass and fully fund the RECLAIM Act and Abandoned Mine Land Reauthorization Act to spur economic development in hard-hit mining communities by restoring land and water resources impacted by coal mining. Congress should invest $10 billion over 10 years to clear the entire backlog of abandoned mine restoration projects.

- **And more...** for a complete list of land and outdoors investments, see Sierra Club’s letter to Congress that outlines specific priorities for a bold stimulus package that puts millions of people back to work to build a healthier, more equitable, clean energy economy.