

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 2, 2021

Secretary Deb Haaland  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write to you to share our strong support for protecting our environment and our ocean from the devastating impacts of plastic pollution. Plastic pollution is more than just an environmental impact problem – it is a human health, environmental justice, and climate change crisis. The ability to properly handle these materials is overwhelming and the impact is past a crisis tipping point, which is why we are writing to urge the National Park Service (NPS) to reduce the sale or distribution of single-use plastics in our national parks.

Nearly 11 million metric tons of plastic waste enter the ocean every year – from land-based sources alone.<sup>1</sup> Without any action, this flow is expected to triple to nearly 29 million metric tons by 2040.<sup>1</sup> Single-use plastics, such as disposable water bottles, account for at least 40% of the plastic produced every year.<sup>2</sup> Public lands are not only threatened directly from plastic litter, recent studies have found that national parks and wilderness areas are accumulating microplastics from the rain and wind, causing unknown impacts on critically important ecosystems.

The impacts of plastic extend far beyond harming wildlife and polluting our land – plastic production and waste management are directly contributing to climate change. The greenhouse gas emissions linked to this production are estimated to reach 1.3 billion tons by 2030, equivalent to 300 coal-fired power plants.<sup>3</sup> We cannot tackle the issue of climate change or environmental justice without addressing plastic waste.

In 2011, the National Park Service Director issued Policy Memo 11-03 that allowed parks to voluntarily establish disposable plastic water bottle sale elimination programs to reduce single-use plastics in our nation's parks. A 2017 NPS report found that this policy diverted between 1.3 and 2 million disposable plastic water bottles, a savings of up to 111,743 pounds of plastic and 141 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>4</sup> This policy was rolled back in 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> “Breaking the Plastic Wave: A Comprehensive Assessment of Pathways Towards Stopping Ocean Plastic Pollution.” *Pew Charitable Trusts*. 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Geyer et al., “Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made” *Science*. 2017.

<sup>3</sup> “Plastics & Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet.” *Center for International Environmental Law*. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> “Disposable Plastic Water Bottle Recycling and Reduction Program Evaluation Report.” National Park Service. 2017.

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We urge you to direct the National Park Service to reinstate this policy. We also urge you to require that all park units establish a program to minimize the sale of disposable plastic beverage containers. We further urge you to ensure that each National Park unit institute recycling requirements, where feasible, and plastic reduction strategies in concession contracts. We are joined in this request by over 300 environmental and environmental justice organizations and businesses who wrote to you earlier this month calling for the elimination of single-use plastics in our National Parks.

As the agency tasked with promoting public stewardship through education and engagement, we believe the NPS can play a critical role in educating the public about the threat of plastic pollution and can lead by example in reducing plastic pollution to protect the health of our public lands for future generations of the American public. We thank you for your continued leadership and look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley  
Oregon



Senator Dianne Feinstein  
California



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
New York



Senator Chris Van Hollen  
Maryland



Senator Ron Wyden  
Oregon



Senator Alex Padilla  
California



Senator Elizabeth Warren  
Massachusetts



Senator Richard Blumenthal  
Connecticut



Senator Chris S. Murphy  
Connecticut



Senator Cory A. Booker  
New Jersey

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Massachusetts



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Senator Benjamin L. Cardin  
Maryland