



para la
Naturaleza

**CINCO
DÉCADAS**
Conservando
el futuro

February 24, 2023

The Honorable Jenniffer González-Colón

2338 Rayburn HOB
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Draft Bill - Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act

Dear Representative Jenniffer González-Colón,

We are grateful for your request to submit our comments and recommendations on the Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act. At Para la Naturaleza, we have a great interest in protecting and restoring ecosystems with high ecological value. We currently protect over 38,500 acres of land in the islands of Puerto Rico and are active leaders in offering diverse recreational opportunities such as hiking and guided tours. We support the draft bill for the Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act because we understand, and know firsthand, how important well-planned trails are in positively impacting the environment, communities, and the local economy.

Well-planned and managed trails offer great value and opportunities to preserve, restore, and maintain key elements of high ecological value lands. The principle of Biodiversity, that is, a habitat with a wide variety of living creatures, is a key element in proper environmental management. Following this principle, different types of ecological corridors have become popular in the last few decades. We understand that a National Scenic Trail is an opportunity to create or strengthen ecological corridors that connect already protected lands. These natural connections, based on the principle of Biodiversity, can drastically improve the health of ecosystems by:

1. Providing opportunities for food exchange between animals.
2. Generating more diverse gene pools in individual species to resist diseases and pathogens.
3. Letting the ecosystem naturally restore and adapt itself after extreme weather events.
4. Improving water quantity and quality.

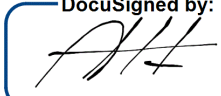
Trails are not just paths through which a person travels. They are paths that connect many places, animals, trees, soils, bodies of water, and people.

Integrating communities and their needs are fundamental to ensure the effectiveness of conservation and outdoor recreation projects. The values that well-designed trails offer to community members are unmatched. Recreation opportunities, such as improving physical and mental health and teaching outside the classroom, are just the tip of the iceberg in

terms of the social benefits that well-managed trails can offer. At Para la Naturaleza, and at many other local organizations in Puerto Rico, we currently run projects that offer outdoor experiences to educate people, volunteer opportunities to study and restore habitats, and strengthen our local economy with ethical ecotourism. However, we understand that more cohesive and integrated efforts are needed to make outdoor recreation accessible to more people. After extreme weather events in the last decade, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and extreme droughts, we and local communities have understood that collaboration and collective efforts are the two main forces that drive successful long-term projects that benefit the environment and communities. For this reason, we reiterate our support for the Puerto Rico National Scenic Trail Study Act.

We are thankful for your invitation to comment on this bill, and we are more than willing to provide additional resources if requested.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Fernando Lloveras San Miguel, Esq.
President
Para La Naturaleza