

The House of Representatives' Natural Resources Committee is preparing legislation and strongly considering including full and dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at the authorized annual level of \$900 million.

Your support is needed NOW to let your members of Congress know how much you care about the LWCF and the special places that it protects such as parks, refuges, trails, cultural and historic places, public lands, and other recreation areas in your community. Tell them that their support is needed to ensure that an LWCF full funding provision is a top priority and that you will be counting on them to help get this provision enacted into law.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The LWCF provides critical federal investments in America's natural, cultural, and recreational heritage by acquiring and protecting public lands and developing new recreational facilities in the regional, state, and local parks near where 80% of Americans live.

The LWCF federal program has added millions of acres to our national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, national historic and scenic trails, wild and scenic river corridors, Bureau of Land Management lands, and other federal lands. Most of the nation's largest intact landscapes, historically important sites, and recreational areas are found on these public lands.

The LWCF state assistance program has helped to develop thousands of trails, recreation fields, and other park facilities for Americans to use in their daily lives, as well as acquire new parks and recreation lands in every state in the nation.

The LWCF was created by Congress in 1965 and is authorized to receive \$900 million annually from a portion of the federal revenues from oil and gas leasing of the Outer Continental Shelf. Unfortunately, the program has been woefully underfunded, receiving full funding only once in its multi-decade history. In the last eight years, funding has steadily declined, with a low of \$150 million in 2008. As a result, there is a substantial backlog of federal land acquisition needs estimated at more than \$30 billion. The states also report a huge unmet need for local parks and recreation resources totaling more than \$27 billion in eligible projects.

A recent national poll reports that a broad cross-section of the American public overwhelmingly supports preserving natural areas and open space. In addition, 81% of the public believes the continuance of a dedicated funding stream from federal oil and gas leasing should be used to fund the LWCF.

Jobs, Tourism, and Quality of Life: Visitor-driven business is important to local communities surrounding national parks and other public lands. Local economies are made more vibrant and resilient by the natural and cultural amenities and the abundant recreational opportunities provided by proximity to parks and public lands. These amenities greatly enhance communities' quality of life, which in turn helps large and small localities to attract new residents and businesses and to generate tourism-related jobs and revenues.

A 2006 study by the National Parks & Conservation Association calculates that more than \$13 billion flows into local communities and 250,000 private sector jobs are generated by national park visitation. National wildlife refuges provide essential habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, a safe haven for endangered species, and hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching opportunities, while adding local economic benefits of \$1.7 billion annually.

Public Health: Parks, trails, and open space promote healthy lifestyles. Whether it is close-to-home ball fields or trails, or large expansive wilderness areas, connecting people to recreation and outdoors activity promotes good health. Access to natural areas reduces stress, mitigates obesity and other health issues, connects families and communities, and enhances the quality of life for all Americans.

Clean Water: Protection of water supplies the old-fashioned way through watershed, forest, and wetland conservation, is the most cost-efficient way to ensure clean and adequate water supplies for communities. The value of water flowing through our national forests alone is \$4.3 billion annually. Polling has found that 89% of Americans surveyed identify clean water and drinking supplies as their top conservation concern.

Hunting and Fishing: Hunters and anglers know how important land conservation is to outdoor recreation. Hunting and fishing has become an economic building block in our national economy generating more than 1.6 million jobs and more than \$2 billion annually in salaries, wages, and business earnings. In 2006, more than \$70 billion was generated in sportsmen-related retail sales. With the "ripple effect" this translates to more than \$190 billion in total economic activity.

Fire Prevention: The escalating numbers of wildfires particularly in western states and associated fire fighting costs have devoured the budgets of the Forest Service and the BLM. Between 2002 and 2006, the federal government spent more than \$6 billion fighting wildfires, primarily to protect private homes and property bordering public lands. Land acquisition and protection along the

forested-development edge of our communities is an essential tool to prevent forest fires.

Education: America's parks provide students young and old with an opportunity to learn about our nation's unique historical and cultural heritage. Our parks and public lands are outdoor classrooms where the learning experience never ends regardless of whether the lesson is about wildlife, history, geology or the environment. Children and families are able to connect to preserved landscapes in a hands-on manner they simply cannot receive by reading a textbook or watching a documentary.

Preserving America's natural, cultural, historical, and recreational heritage:

There are intangible and invaluable benefits in preserving public lands and telling the stories of our nation's natural and cultural heritage. Whether it is viewing the night sky in Utah's Zion's National Park, hiking the Appalachian Trail, or studying the Civil War at Gettysburg National Military Park, the nation's collective heritage is continually being preserved through public landscapes. Our state and local parks, trails, and greenways provide day-to-day getaways for children and families and complement our system of nationally protected landscapes.