



# National Recreation and Park Association

**Written Testimony of Barbara Tulipane, President and CEO  
Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Regarding Fiscal Year 2014 Appropriations  
April 24, 2013**

Thank you Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and other honorable members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to submit written testimony pertaining to funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund's (LWCF) State Assistance Program and the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 Interior Appropriations bill.

**Overview of Funding Request:**

As outlined below, we encourage you to renew the federal investment in the LWCF. However, given that the purpose of the Act is to help preserve, develop, and assure access to outdoor recreation facilities to strengthen the health of U.S. citizens, we urge you to make a greater investment in states and local communities by:

- Allocating a minimum of 40 percent of FY 2014 LWCF appropriations to the State Assistance Program;
- Maintaining the State Assistance Program's distribution formula in its current form; and
- Allocating \$15 million in funding for the UPARR in FY 2014 out of total LWCF appropriations.

**About the National Recreation and Park Association:**

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), is a nonprofit organization working to advance parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts nationwide. Our members touch the lives of every American in every community every day. Through our network of approximately 30,000 citizen and professional members we represent park and recreation departments in cities, counties, townships, special park districts, and regional park authorities, along with citizens concerned with ensuring close-to-home access to parks and recreation opportunities exist in their communities.

**40 Percent Allocation of Total LWCF Appropriations to the State Assistance Program:**

There is a common misconception that LWCF is merely a federal land acquisition program. Nothing could be further from the truth, as the LWCF State Assistance Program provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to states and local communities for the construction of outdoor recreation projects. The land purchased with LWCF State Assistance funding remains the property of the state or local government, and the resources developed through the LWCF remain publicly accessible in perpetuity.

The LWCF provides numerous benefits to local communities across America, and it does so through a well-recognized and dedicated funding source - namely oil and gas leasing revenues. Over \$6 billion a year is provided through these leases, with a small fraction provided to the LWCF. Unfortunately an even smaller fraction is provided to the State Assistance Program. This is in large part due to the fact that current law mandates that a minimum of 40 percent of the total LWCF annual appropriations must be provided to the federal land acquisition program without specifying an amount for the State Assistance Program.

As a result, states and local communities have historically received a very disproportionate share of the total LWCF appropriations, with only 11 percent of total LWCF funding going to the State Assistance Program since 1998. Most recently, in Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013, you provided approximately \$322 million for the LWCF, with \$44 million, or 13 percent, allocated to the State Assistance program.<sup>1</sup> We appreciate that you've recently recognized the importance of the State Assistance Program and allocated a larger percentage of total LWCF appropriations to it. For nearly 50 years, however, the bulk of the work to carry out purpose of the Act has fallen on local communities to handle alone. For the reasons outlined below, we are asking you to empower states and local communities to do more to preserve, develop, and assure access to outdoor recreation facilities to strengthen our nation by allocating 40 percent of total LWCF appropriations to the State Assistance Program in FY2014.

#### **LWCF State Assistance's Return on Investment and Return on Objective:**

One of the key aspects of the LWCF State Assistance Program is the ability to create jobs. The outdoor recreation industry, as such is supported by LWCF State Assistance, is an economic powerhouse in the United States. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, the industry generates \$646 billion in consumer spending and supports over 6 million jobs annually.<sup>2</sup> Impressively, this section of the economy continues to grow even during the ongoing economic recession, and thus has enormous potential to immediately create new jobs. For example, the Outdoor Industry Association reported in October 2011 that the outdoor recreation industry grew at a rate of 5 percent annually between 2005 and 2011. Considering there are 7,800 state and over 100,000 locally managed parks throughout the country, it is obvious that outdoor recreation is most prevalent at the state and local level. In fact, the National Association of State Park Directors reports that America's state park system contributes \$20 billion to local and state economies each year.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt, that it is the LWCF State Assistance Program that provides the places, spaces, and opportunities for outdoor recreation which stimulates the outdoor industry.

When viewed through the lens of the importance of the American outdoor recreation industry, the LWCF State Assistance Program has, for more than four decades, achieved a proven return on investment (ROI) demonstrated by the fact that \$3.7 billion in federal support has leveraged nearly \$4 billion additional dollars in matching funds. But the benefits of this program, don't stop there, as the State Assistance Program has not only provided a ROI, but has also done a tremendous job of providing an outstanding return on objective for the American taxpayer by ensuring access for all.

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<sup>1</sup> Amounts reflect amounts provided through appropriations and do not reflect sequestration reduction.

<sup>2</sup> Outdoor Industry Association, "The Outdoor Recreation Economy Report 2012"

<sup>3</sup> NASPD Annual Report, March 2013

It is well known that not everyone has the ability to visit one of our treasured national parks, and even those who do so are unable to on a regular basis as national parks are often vacation destinations or once-in-a-lifetime trips. To the average American, however, the neighborhood park – down the street, open and accessible to the public, and without an admission fee – is the most important public space in their lives. Many of our country's local places, spaces, and opportunities for outdoor recreation are provided through this program, with more than 40,000 grant projects located in 99 percent of America's counties.

The State Assistance Program is the only federal investment tool dedicated to ensuring that Americans have access to local public recreation opportunities. Because the LWCF State Assistance Program provides close-to-home recreation opportunities, millions of Americans, young and old, are annually connected with nature and provided the ability to be physically active and simply enjoy a life that they may otherwise be denied.

The LWCF State Assistance Program ensures that local communities, such as American Falls, Idaho and Alexandria, Virginia have places where adults and children can go to recreate and enjoy the outdoors. It is a means by which this committee can provide investment to critically important local parks, including: Klickitat Prairie Park in Mossyrock, Washington; Thompson Park in Barboursville, Bob Amos Park in Pikeville, Kentucky; and the Forest Ridge Preserve in Moreland Hills, Ohio. Each of the aforementioned communities benefited from State Assistance grant funding in FY 2012.

#### **LWCF State Assistance Provides Health and Environmental Benefits:**

In addition to creating jobs and ensuring access for all, the LWCF State Assistance Program delivers tangible health benefits, contributing to the overall health and well-being of Americans. The National Park Service recognizes this through its Healthy Parks Healthy People US initiative, which aims to increase public recognition of parks and public lands (including state, local, and regional park and trail systems) as places for the promotion of physical, mental, and social health. The CDC reports that childhood obesity has tripled in the last 30 years, less than 25 percent of adults engage in recommended levels of physical activity, and that obesity is a leading cause of chronic disease. As noted by the CDC, increased access to parks, green space, and recreation opportunities is essential to becoming a healthier nation and reducing unsustainable health care costs.

The LWCF State Assistance Program also significantly contributes to protecting the environment and promoting environmental stewardship. LWCF State Assistance projects have a historical record of contributing to reduced and delayed stormwater runoff volumes, enhanced groundwater recharge, stormwater pollutant reductions, reduced sewer overflow events, increased carbon sequestration, urban heat island mitigation and reduced energy demands, resulting in improved air quality, increased wildlife habitat, and increased land values on the local level.

#### **Maintaining The LWCF State Assistance Program's Current Distribution Formula:**

As noted above, close-to-home public parks and recreation are available to every age, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class in every community, both urban and rural, in every state. This is made possible because LWCF State Assistance funding has always been allocated by formula,

whereby a portion of funds are equally allocated among all states and territories and the remainder is allocated based on population. This ensures that 100 percent of the State Assistance funding is equitably distributed throughout the nation.

In FY 2012 and FY 2013, attempts were made to change the LWCF State Assistance distribution formula for the purposes of a Department of the Interior (DOI)-controlled competitive grant program whereby DOI officials would decide the needs of local communities. NRPA believes that local needs are best determined and addressed at the community level. For almost 50 years this has been achieved through the balanced, formula-based distribution approach of the State Assistance Program. We thank you for preserving the State Assistance Program's existing distribution formula in FYs 2012 and 2013 and ask you to continue that preservation in FY 2014.

**Revitalizing Urban Parks and Recreation through Funding of UPARR:**

While the LWCF has indeed benefited virtually every community in the country, many of our nation's cities and urbanized counties face distinct challenges that require additional resources. Recognizing this fact as well as the importance of public parks and recreation to larger urban renewal and community development efforts, Congress established the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR) to provide matching grants directly to localities in metropolitan areas. Over the course of more than two decades UPARR provided \$272 million for nearly 1,500 projects in 380 communities. This enabled neighborhoods across the country to restore both outdoor and indoor recreation facilities; support innovative recreational programming and enhance delivery of services and programs that provided constructive alternatives to at-risk youth.

Despite its successes, UPARR has not been funded since FY 2002, yet many of the urban open space and recreation challenges still exist today. NRPA is very pleased to see UPARR in the President's FY 2014 budget and calls on Congress to update and fund this needed program to enable metropolitan areas to address quality of life, health and wellness, and conservation issues as they improve their communities and make them more attractive for families and businesses alike. Both LWCF State Assistance and UPARR are critical to providing Americans close to home recreation opportunities. The programs complement each other and NRPA implores Congress to fund UPARR from total LWCF appropriations but not at the expense of the already underfunded State Assistance Program.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, few programs can address so many national priorities as effectively as the LWCF State Assistance Program and UPARR do, with so few dollars and without negatively impacting the federal budget. This subcommittee and Congress have the rare opportunity to achieve national goals without increasing spending or adding to the deficit, and can do so by adopting three simple recommendations: Allocate a minimum of 40 percent of LWCF funding to the State Assistance Program; prohibit any diversion, or change to, the formula funding being made available to States through the State Assistance Program; and address the need for improved infrastructure in urban areas by allocating a portion of the total LWCF funding to UPARR.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share NRPA's recommendations and your consideration of our request.