

**Written Testimony of Barbara Tulipane, CEO on behalf of
The National Recreation and Park Association
Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
Regarding Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations
March 28, 2011**

Thank you Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and other honorable members of the subcommittee for this opportunity to submit written testimony on the Fiscal Year 2012 Interior Appropriations bill.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a national, non-profit organization with a mission of advancing parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people. Park and recreation agencies touch the lives of every American in every community. Through our network of approximately 20,000 citizen and professional members we represent park and recreation departments in cities, counties, townships, special park districts, regional park authorities, and citizens concerned with ensuring close-to-home access to parks and recreation opportunities in their communities.

As your subcommittee works to craft the Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations bill, we request that you do NOT zero out funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). While we recognize that these are tough economic times, funding for the LWCF is a budget neutral item because the program is authorized for this amount to be paid for with oil and gas leasing revenue. Additionally, LWCF is much more than a federal land acquisition program. It also provides grants to states and local communities, grants that must be matched dollar-for-dollar, for the construction of outdoor recreation projects which create jobs and build healthy communities. We, therefore, specifically request that you to invest in the nation's local communities by allocating a minimum of forty-percent of total LWCF appropriations to the State Assistance program in FY 2012.

By ensuring an allocation of forty-percent, the subcommittee has the opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution to the economy since every state in the nation annually receives funding through the LWCF State Assistance program, which has funded projects in ninety-eight percent of counties. The LWCF State Assistance program provides critical investments in close-to-home parks and outdoor recreation infrastructure in urban population centers as well as rural area. This funding is used for capital projects and cannot be used for operations.

In a report prepared by the National Park Service in March of 2011, it is documented that the FY 2009 the \$40 million appropriated to the LWCF State Assistance program made a direct impact on park and recreation facilities in or near 221 local communities, helped communities make 5,905 new acres available for outdoor recreation use and enjoyment and helped "encourage active participation to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States pursuant to the original intent of the Act."

Finally, beyond the program's direct assistance to develop and enhance facilities, every assisted site is protected against conversion to non-recreation use to ensure the federal and state/local investment remains available for recreational use, not just for today's citizens, but for all future generations of Americans. In FY 2010, the LWCF State Assistance stewardship protection was expanded by a total of 34,367 acres.

According to a 2010 report by the National Park Service, our country faces \$12.1 billion in unmet need relative to outdoor recreational resources. For example, according to the National Park Service:

- Expanding and developing Virginia's state park system heads the list of critical projects, totaling \$105,431,465 that went unfunded.
- Kansas state parks saw a 32% increase in 2009 visitation, which contributed to an increase in unmet needs of \$101 million for the State's parks and outdoor recreation facilities.
- Washington's estimated unmet need of \$227.4 million represents a diverse portfolio of outdoor recreation projects, including acquisition, new construction, and the renovation of aging recreational sites.

There is undoubtedly need for a continued robust investment. Funding provided through LWCF State Assistance not only provides necessary community resources for outdoor recreation opportunities, community health resources, and environmental stewardship, it also stimulates state and local economies, and job creation.

It is obvious that LWCF State Assistance funds are vital to many states and literally determines whether local, regional, or state park recreation facilities are available for public use. The need for recreational resources has exponentially increased at a rate that simply cannot be met with local resources alone. Federal assistance is required to meet the growing demand.

LWCF State Assistance Stimulates Jobs Creation and Local Economies

Projects funded through the LWCF State Assistance program stimulate outdoor recreation and local economies. Close-to-home recreation has become increasingly important as a result of the current economic downturn. The National Association of State Park Directors reports that America's state park system contributes \$20 billion to local and state economies. Additionally, The Outdoor Industry Association reports that recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy, supports 6.5 million jobs across the country (this equates to 1 in every 20 jobs), generates \$49 billion in annual national tax revenue, produces \$289 billion annually in retail sales and services across the U.S., and provides sustainable growth in rural communities.

As you can see from the examples below, the LWCF State Assistance program has an incredible impact on job creation in states throughout the country.

In Idaho, the LWCF State Assistance has funded projects such as the Modie Wildlife Park and Riverfront Park which ensure the citizens of Idaho stay connected with nature, active, and healthy. The Idaho Active Outdoor Recreation Economy supports 37,000 jobs

across Idaho, generates \$154 million in annual state tax revenue, and produces \$2.2 billion annually in retail sales and services across Idaho – more than a 5 % of gross state product.

Virtually every community in New York has acquired and/or developed outdoor recreational facilities with the help of the LWCF. As a result, the New York Active Outdoor Recreation economy supports 130,000 jobs across New York, generates nearly \$800 million in annual state tax revenue, and produces \$11.3 billion annually in retail sales and services.

Arizonans also recreate close-to-home in local parks and venues. Parks like the De Anza Trail help the Arizona Active Outdoor Recreation Economy support 82,000 jobs across Arizona, generate nearly \$350 million in annual state tax revenue, and produce almost \$5 billion annually in retail sales and services.

Without the continued support by the government for the nation’s treasured parks and recreation sites, Congress would effectively contribute to state unemployment rates and budget deficits.

Public Health

The LWCF State Assistance program plays a critical role in advancing parks and recreation that directly contributes to fighting our nation’s obesity and “Type 2” diabetes epidemics. Several medical studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between proximity to recreational facilities and parks and physical activity. It is estimated that obesity costs the United States government about \$344 billion in medical-related expenses by 2018, accounting for approximately 21% of health-care spending. The CDC currently estimates 65% of adults and 16% of children are overweight or obese, and even small improvements in the lifestyles of Americans would yield marked health improvements and contribute substantially to decreasing the nation’s rising health care costs. In fact, CDC notes that the creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25.6% increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days per week. Investing in programs such as the LWCF State Assistance program would provide a significant return on investment through the **reduction** in health care costs.

Environmental Benefits

The LWCF State Assistance program not only meets important national goals and delivers tangible benefits to the American public by improving health, providing recreation opportunities to all Americans, and improving communities through economic development, it also significantly contributes to protecting our 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.

LWCF State Assistance: Addressing National Issues on the Local Level

The following examples, provided by the National Park Service:

Focal Points of Close-to-Home access to Health and the Outdoors in Urban Areas

In Clark County, Washington, LWCF funding enabled the Salmon Creek Greenspace to acquire uplands and riparian wetlands at the confluence of Salmon Creek and Morgan Creek will provide new trail access for hiking, walking and trail running. The 64-acre acquisition protects critical open space within the City of Battle Ground.

In Davis County, Utah, the Farmington Ranches Neighborhood Park project will use LWCF funding to help create a new 8-acre city park within a rapidly developing subdivision of Western Farmington. Phase one will include restrooms, walkways, picnic area, a playground, ball courts, landscaping and a sprinkler system.

Economic Development and Community Benefits of Parks and Access to Recreation

In Kern County, California, Annin Avenue Recreation Park received LWCF funding to acquire approximately 12 acres of land, previously slated for industrial use, to develop a vital green space for sports activities in a low income agricultural community. Annin Avenue Recreation Park will add nine AYSO-regulation soccer fields and two baseball fields.

In Craig County, Virginia, with the nearest comparable recreation facilities a 30-50 minute drive, county residents will welcome the new Craig County Recreation Complex supported by the acquisition of 18 acres using LWCF State Assistance funding. Current plans include facilities for baseball, softball, soccer, ADA accessible trails, picnicking and passive recreation.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, parks and recreation agencies are not merely community amenities; they are essential services which are necessary for the economic and environmental vitality as well as physical wellness of communities throughout this country. By providing funding for LWCF's State Assistance program, which has proven itself invaluable to addressing national issues, Congress would be investing in the health and well-being of communities across this nation from the standpoint of economic recovery, environmental protection, as well as providing safe and affordable places for recreation. Because this investment has a positive impact on the national economy in the areas through job creation and local economic stimulation, now is the ideal time to invest into this program that has been underfunded over the years. The lack of required federal operations, maintenance, and staff funding of these state and local projects is yet another reason why investment is advantageous to the American taxpayer.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact Stacey Pine, Chief Government Affairs for NRPA at 202-887-0290 or spine@nrpa.org for more information