



Statement Text

As a broad coalition of sportsmen, veterans, business, recreation, historic preservation and conservation leaders concerned with America's outdoor heritage, we urge Congress to act quickly to pass legislation providing full, dedicated funding and permanent reauthorization for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Finding a permanent solution for this incredibly successful bipartisan program – before the program's current authorizing legislation expires on September 30 of this year – is a critical priority for our nation's communities and the special places on which they depend.

LWCF addresses the most urgent conservation, access and funding problems facing American hunters and anglers, outdoor businesses, and recreationists today. At the same time, it meets critical state and local recreation needs; secures conservation easements that secure the future of working forests, farms, and ranches; and protects the most important sites of our unique American history. The annual diversion of LWCF funds to non-conservation purposes has left a legacy of backlogged conservation and recreation needs and willing seller landowners. This underfunding of our nation's premiere fund for land and water protection must be addressed as soon as possible.

LWCF was a promise made to the American people over 50 years ago to take the proceeds from natural resource development in our nation's Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) and invest a small portion of those dollars in conservation and outdoor recreation. LWCF provides a flexible set of conservation tools for locally-driven projects that have touched all fifty states and nearly every county in America. Despite that success, the promise of LWCF remains unfulfilled. Only once has the full \$900 million authorized level been met. Funding over time has varied wildly, falling far short of true needs across America, and in recent years only about one-third of LWCF's authorized funding has been directed to its intended conservation and outdoor recreation purposes. Every LWCF program is oversubscribed, with demand for state and local recreation, access for sportsmen and outdoor recreation enthusiasts, working lands conservation, Civil War battlefield protection and other locally supported LWCF priorities far exceeding annual LWCF appropriations.

To meet these needs now and in the future, we urge Congress to permanently reauthorize LWCF without delay, with full, dedicated funding and free of weakening changes that would shift funding from LWCF's central, crucial conservation and outdoor recreation purposes. As you consider LWCF reauthorization, please bear the following facts in mind:

- LWCF is already paid for – without using a single taxpayer dollar. Every year, \$900 million is deposited into LWCF from the many billions of dollars the Treasury collects from offshore oil drilling and other federal energy revenue sources. Congress created LWCF with a simple idea in mind: when we sell oil and gas that belongs to all Americans, at least a small portion of the proceeds should be reinvested in something of lasting value for us all. NO tax dollars or other general revenues are used for LWCF.
- LWCF Expands Recreation Access for Hunting, Fishing, and Other Public Use. LWCF is essential to make public lands public by securing recreation access, particularly where opportunities for sportsmen and others to access public lands are limited or precluded. We recognize that LWCF is uniquely able to make outdoor

recreation available to all Americans, and we support proposed language further ensuring a sustained commitment to resolving access issues. LWCF opens more land to the public.

- LWCF Provides Critical Funding for State and Local Projects. In addition to safeguarding key resource areas in our national parks, forests, and other nationally significant landscapes, LWCF includes significant grant funding for vital state and local park needs. It also funds the Forest Legacy Program, which allows for working lands easements that support jobs in the woods, protect water and wildlife, and ensure permanent access to recreation throughout the country. Communities across the country rely on LWCF for local projects and jobs.

- LWCF keeps faith with willing-seller private property owners. Across America, landowners needing to sell their properties want to see those lands conserved for public use. Providing LWCF funds honors their property rights as willing sellers, including their rights to fair compensation, and their public-spirited intent as landowners. LWCF ensures that property rights are respected and that landowners are treated fairly.

- LWCF supports a vibrant and important part of our nation's economy. LWCF is a vital investment in safeguarding and enhancing the economic asset that our federal, state and local public lands represent. The parks, trails, forests, rivers, wildlife refuges, battlefields, historic and cultural sites, conservation areas and working lands sustained by LWCF funding support an outdoor recreation and tourism sector that contributes a total of \$1.06 trillion annually to the American economy, supporting 9.4 million jobs (1 out of every 15 jobs in the U.S.). Spending LWCF revenues on their intended conservation purposes makes good fiscal sense.

Recognizing that Congress faces difficult budget choices, we strongly believe that the LWCF promise to America's people, communities, and economy must be kept, and that the need for sustained investment of LWCF's existing OCS-based revenue stream is clear. For 50 years, bipartisan support of LWCF has helped to meet a broad spectrum of conservation needs across America. In that same spirit and with so much at stake, we urge enactment of full, permanent, and dedicated funding of LWCF in this critical reauthorization year.