



The Land and Water Conservation Fund

Summary: Congress must fully fund and permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The LWCF remains the premier federal program to conserve our nation's land, water, historic, and recreation heritage. Yet, the LWCF will expire on September 30th, 2015, unless Congress acts immediately.

The LWCF's 50-Year Track Record of Enhancing Recreation and Conservation¹

The LWCF was established in 1964 and directs royalties from offshore oil production to the acquisition of land and in-holdings from willing sellers for the improvement of public recreation, habitat preservation, wildlife refuges and national parks. The bill was designed to assure our growing population that outdoor recreation lands would be secured, on a pay-as-you-go basis, to meet the needs of future Americans. Investments in the LWCF support public land conservation and ensure access to the outdoors for all Americans, in rural communities and cities alike.

The LWCF has created outdoor recreation opportunities in every state and 98 percent of counties across the country, opening up key areas for hunting, fishing, and other recreational access; supporting working forests and ranches; and acquiring inholdings and protecting critical lands in national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, Civil War battlefields, and other federal areas. The State and Local Grants Program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions in cities, counties, and rural towns as well as recreational facilities and trail corridors. Over the life of the program, approximately \$4 billion in LWCF grants to states has leveraged more than \$7 billion in nonfederal matching funds, supporting over 41,000 projects. The LWCF also serves as a key source of funding to purchase land for the completion of iconic long-distance trails, including the Appalachian, Pacific Crest, and Continental Divide National Scenic Trails. The importance of the LWCF applies to all of the national scenic and historic trails that are a part of the National Trails System, which provides public recreation access to important landscapes throughout the nation. From constructing trails to improving community parks, playgrounds and ballfields, the LWCF's 50:50 matching program is the primary federal investment tool to ensure that families have easy access to public, open spaces.

Full Potential of the LWCF Has Yet to be Realized

The LWCF was intended to direct \$900 million each year—at no cost to U.S. taxpayers—to the purposes described above. However, Congress has consistently redirected much of LWCF's funding for other purposes. Throughout its 50-year history, over \$18 billion of LWCF funds have been diverted from their original conservation purpose. The LWCF program has invested in scenic trails and local parks, wildlife refuges and open spaces both big and small in virtually every county in the U.S. This landmark program is one of the best ways to ensure public lands are whole and intact—shaping a vast landscape for recreation and conservation. Congress must act immediately to fully fund and permanently reauthorize this landmark legislation.

¹ Statistics and text drawn from the Congressional Research Service, Land and Water Conservation Fund: Overview, Funding History, and Issues, October 21, 2014; and from a March 23, 2015, letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations) from Representatives Mike Thompson, Patrick Meehan, G.K. Butterfield, Chris Gibson, James McGovern, Mike Fitzpatrick, Raúl Grijalva, Dave Reichert, and Jared Huffman.