

## The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

### A Simple Idea

In 1964, Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to preserve natural areas and wildlife and ensure that all Americans have access to quality outdoor recreation. It was a simple idea and an elegant one and remains so today: use revenues from offshore oil and gas drilling to support the conservation of America's lands and waters. The creation of the LWCF demonstrated Congress' bipartisan recognition of the importance of safeguarding open spaces and natural areas and providing outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans.

### How LWCF Was Designed to Work

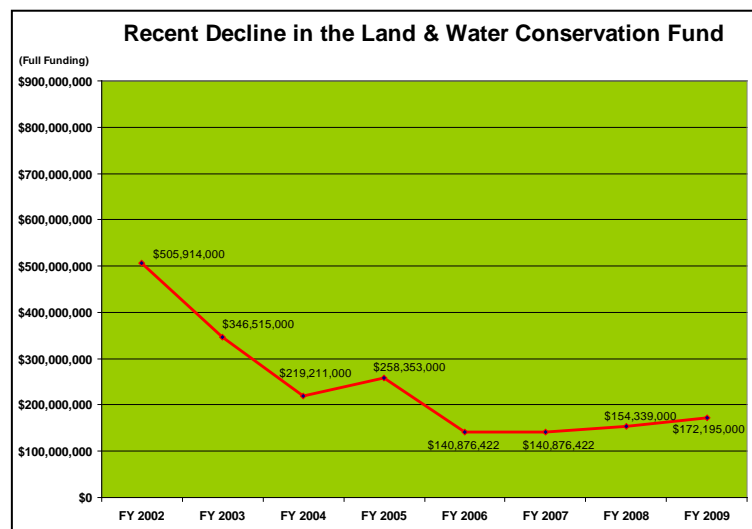


Each year, \$900 million from Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) drilling lease proceeds are dedicated to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (16 USC 4601). Congress appropriates these funds into two complementary programs:

1. A federal program that funds the purchase of land and water areas for conservation and recreation, and the development of recreational resources open to all Americans. The federal program has preserved a total of 4.7 million acres, including Redwood National Park in California and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, stretching from Maine to Georgia.
2. A state matching grants program, often referred to as the "stateside" program, which provides federal funds to states and localities to assist in the planning, acquisition, and development of land and water areas. Local parks and recreation areas have used this stateside program to acquire land, build hiking and riding trails, build or repair recreation or park facilities, and enhance recreational access.

### A Broken Promise

Congress has broken its promise to the American people by misusing the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Every year since 1980, Congress has diverted as much as 85 percent of the fund's \$900 million in dedicated OCS revenues for projects unrelated to conservation and recreation. In fact, since Congress originally made its commitment to conserve the American outdoors in 1964, it has diverted more than \$16 billion. In 1962 President Kennedy warned, "Actions deferred are all too often opportunities lost, particularly in safeguarding our natural resources." Chronic misappropriation of LWCF monies has undermined Congress' intent to safeguard America's natural places and recreation areas.



### An Investment with Results

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a long-term investment in Americans' enjoyment of open spaces. As of 2008, LWCF has provided more than \$14.4 billion across both programs and funded more than 40,000 state and

local park and recreation projects.<sup>1</sup> Often, the fund recovers private land surrounded by existing public land that balloons the administrative costs of the park entirely out of line with the acreage of the property. Private residents require roads, law enforcement and a host of other services, and may disproportionately impact the surrounding land through the use of off-road vehicles.

In urban and suburban areas, the stateside program funds smaller-scale land reclamation projects that contribute to higher property values, increased residents' quality of life, aids in job creation and strengthens communities. LWCF has been the key to the longer-term problem of providing and protecting places for all Americans to recreate, relax, and get outdoors.



### **The Value of the Land and Water Conservation Fund**

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.

Tourism and recreation play a huge role in boosting local economies. The LWCF adds to a system of public lands which allow hundreds of millions of people each year to enjoy hiking, wildlife watching, hunting, fishing, camping, horseback riding, river rafting and boating, cross country skiing, and outdoor education. The Outdoor Industry Association reports that

recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Providing access for recreation on public lands is a key component to maintaining these economic benefits.

### **Climate Change**

As human activities accelerate the impacts of climate change, we must conserve and connect large, healthy ecosystems and habitats to make sure that biological systems stay strong. The strategic acquisition of key inholdings, buffer areas, and wildlife migration corridors within and adjacent to existing public lands through the LWCF enhances adaptation efforts and fosters intact landscapes. These natural areas store carbon, prevent flooding and wildfire, conserve water, and support healthy fisheries and wildlife populations.

### **Restoring the Land and Water Conservation Fund**

After many years of starvation budgets and long lists of project backlogs, LWCF has begun to rebound. President Obama has pledged to fully fund the program by 2014, and language in a 2009 House Natural Resources Committee Energy Bill would permanently dedicate funds to the program annually. The FY 2010 Department of Interior budget will likely raise the federal LWCF funding level above \$200 million for the first time in four years.

America's vast open spaces and unrivaled public parks system are a testimony to Congress' vision in creating the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Despite its many successes, however, there is still much to be done. Increasing population and expanding commercial and residential development threaten to undo America's conservation accomplishments. Restoring strong funding to the core federal and state LWCF programs must become a priority again. With ample funding, LWCF can continue to preserve America's natural places and create valuable public recreation areas and facilities for all Americans.

### **For more information, please contact:**

Alan Rowsome – Conservation Advocacy Associate (202) 429-2643

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/lwcf/fed\\_state.html](http://www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/lwcf/fed_state.html)