

October 1, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

Our organizations, which represent millions of sportsmen and women and conservation professionals from across the country, are writing to respectfully request your support for reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Since being established with bipartisan support by Congress in 1965, LWCF has done a great deal to expand access to the nation's state and federal recreation resources for America's hunters, anglers, boaters and others who spend time outdoors. Considering the historically important role that LWCF has played in providing increased opportunity for sportsmen and women, we have a vested interest in working with Congressional leaders and relevant committees of jurisdiction to ensure that the fund remains viable and authorized beyond September 30, 2015 when it is set to expire.

From its inception in 1965 through FY 2015, \$36.2 billion from offshore oil and gas royalties have been deposited in the LWCF account and made available for authorized purposes. However, less than half this amount has been appropriated to authorized uses of the fund, leaving an unappropriated balance of \$19.4 billion that has been diverted to other programs or reverted to the U.S. Treasury. Furthermore, Congress has only provided full funding for LWCF at the authorized amount of \$900 million on an annual basis twice despite evidence that suggests the program is widely popular and well received by the general public. The prospect of leaving another \$19.4 billion (or more) in authorized funds on the table over the next 50 years is neither pragmatic nor is it in the best interest of America's sportsmen and women.

With the authorization of LWCF set to expire on September 30, 2015, we view the current time as a significant opportunity to work with Congress to create an updated version of the fund that—in the words of those who established the program—is capable of providing sufficient “quality and quantity” of outdoor recreation resources to promote the “health and vitality” of American citizens in modern times. While recognizing that current and past incarnations of LWCF have facilitated tremendously positive outcomes related to land access, species conservation and recreation infrastructure, we recognize that reauthorizing the LWCF in its current form is unlikely to result in full funding for the program in the foreseeable future, despite the program's merits and the tangible benefits that our constituencies have realized as a result of LWCF projects.

As your Committee considers legislation to reauthorize LWCF, we request that you and your colleagues consider changes that will ultimately strengthen the fund by broadening its appeal to stakeholders, affected communities and other Members of Congress. Collectively, we believe discussion of the following changes proposed by the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (letter attached) could help advance LWCF legislation that permanently reauthorizes the fund and guarantees mandatory full funding on an annual basis both now and in the future.

1. Make LWCF a dedicated, non-appropriated (trust) fund, which also provides dedicated funding for state and federal programs.
2. Include fish and wildlife conservation in the purpose statement of the Act.
3. Include dedicated funding for access programs and projects such as “Making Public Lands Public.”
4. Consider linking LWCF reauthorization with Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding and / or reauthorization.
5. Consider authorizing the use of the fund to cover a portion of maintenance costs for new LWCF projects where fee title acquisitions occur.
6. Include Congressional involvement in key program / project selection (e.g., similar to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, and perhaps with industry participation).
7. Increase the emphasis on land stewardship (habitat / landscape conservation, working lands, etc.).
8. Include coordination of conservation programs with industry / business development.
9. Include urban programs, recognizing that America populations are becoming increasingly urban.
10. Include battlefield and historic preservation as authorized uses of LWCF.
11. Include acquisition and development of recreational facilities.
12. Include Tribal programs to a greater extent.
13. Include strategies to expand LWCF funding – to make it possible to include all currently funded LWCF programs and/or to provide budgetary offsets.

Given the past successes associated with LWCF, we fully recognize that some of the discussion points suggested above may make some Members of Congress and LWCF stakeholders uncomfortable as they would represent significant changes to the program. However, with the LWCF reauthorization deadline fast approaching, we recognize that now is the time for all with a vested interest to have an open and honest discussion about opportunities to modernize LWCF to address contemporary issues, secure full funding for the program and continue its legacy of success.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Bear Trust International
Boone and Crockett Club
Camp Fire Club of America
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Dallas Safari Club

Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
Houston Safari Club
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion – The Hunter’s Institute
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Quality Deer Management Association
Ruffed Grouse Society
Sportsmen’s Alliance
The Wildlife Society
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi