

## **SUBJECT: Sign-on Letter in Support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund**

As Washington State residents concerned with our state's outdoor heritage, we are writing to thank you for your support and continued leadership for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). As outdoor enthusiasts –sportsmen and women, business leaders, recreationists, and conservationists – we write urging action for full and dedicated funding and permanent reauthorization before the program expires on September 30, 2018.

For over 52 years, LWCF has provided critical funding for land and water conservation projects, outdoor recreation access, and the continued preservation of our nation's historic, cultural and iconic landmarks. Without question, Washington is home to some of the most astounding natural treasures in the world. Since its inception, LWCF has provided nearly \$699 million in Washington to protect places such as the Mount Rainier and Olympic National Parks, Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, Columbia River Gorge, and other federal lands popular with Washingtonians and visitors alike.

Equally important are the LWCF matching grants that have enabled local communities across the state to create trails, parks, playgrounds, urban wildlife refuges, greenways, and other recreational facilities. From Riverbend Park in Spokane and GasWorks Park in Seattle, the Burnt Bridge Creek Trail in Vancouver, to the Oak Creek Elk Viewing Area in Yakima County, LWCF projects have benefited a multitude of outdoor activities and places all over our state.

LWCF is our country's most important conservation program, and LWCF projects support local economies, provide infrastructure for public health, tourism and recreation, and increase access to the outdoors in all states and territories. It is paid for with non-taxpayer dollars. In 1965, Congress made a commitment to the American public that a small portion of revenues from offshore drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) would go towards conservation and recreation, as an offset for the depletion of the offshore oil and gas resources that belong to us all. Each year, \$900 million in OCS revenues are deposited in the LWCF Treasury account to be used for conservation and recreation. Unfortunately, over half of LWCF's annual deposits are consistently diverted to unrelated, unspecified uses. Spending these funds on other purposes breaks this promise to the American people. The public does not support using these funds for other purposes – we want and need more access to public lands, not less.

The LWCF is overwhelmingly popular and has maintained broad bipartisan support due to its more than half-century history of successful, locally-driven conservation. Congress has proposed legislation that would permanently reauthorize LWCF in the House (H.R. 502) and Senate (S. 569 and S. 896). These bills have strong bipartisan support —a rare bright spot of common purpose and momentum across party lines that we will continue to foster and support. We hope the 115th Congress will move forward with this legislation to permanently reauthorize and fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

A renewed investment in the LWCF and public land protection is crucial to ensuring the benefits our communities receive from proximity to protected forests, parks, refuges, trails, and other areas for outdoor recreation. It is increasingly clear that a healthy environment and abundant recreational opportunities promote health and quality of life and boost our local and regional economies. Today, active outdoor recreation generates over \$26 billion annually in consumer spending to Washington's economy, supports 201,000 jobs which generate \$7.6 billion in wages and salaries and produces \$2.3 billion annually in state and local tax revenue. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that over 2.7 million people participate in hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching in Washington contributing over \$3 billion to the state economy.

Thank you very much for your support of LWCF. We appreciate the leadership that Members of Washington's Congressional delegation have shown on this critical issue to our state. We are extremely concerned, however, that the clock is ticking down ever closer to expiration, and legislative proposals are moving forward to dedicate OCS revenues to other spending even as the original commitment to LWCF has not been honored. We strongly support immediate action on both permanent reauthorization and full, dedicated funding of LWCF, and look forward to working with you to ensure that Washington—and the nation—can finally reap the full benefits of this successful program.