



Protecting Vital Investments in Conservation

Please Support the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Forest Legacy Program, EPA Regional Programs and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act

Everyone benefits from conservation funding. Protecting America's important natural, agricultural and historic resources is essential to keeping this economic sector strong. The outdoor recreation industry contributes \$1.7 trillion annually to the economy and supports 12.8 million jobs. Protecting these habitats is critical to hunters, fisherman and outdoor enthusiasts.

We ask for your leadership in protecting conservation funding in the 115th Congress.

Land and Water Conservation Fund & Forest Legacy

One of the most important sources of funding for federal and state acquisitions of land and conservation easements is the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). It invests a small portion of revenue from offshore oil and gas leases in conservation. Although they are separate programs from LWCF, the appropriations committees also fund the Forest Legacy Program and Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act (conservation grants to states) out of this source of revenue.

In FY 2016, LWCF funding was \$450 million, its highest annual funding since 2011. President Trump's budget proposed major reductions in funding for federal land acquisition, although his proposal was short on details.

LWCF is authorized only through FY 2018, imperiling future funding of the program. Currently, there is bipartisan legislation in both chambers of Congress to permanently reauthorize this 52 year old program. In the Senate, **S. 569** is sponsored by Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Richard Burr (R-NC). In the House, **H.R. 502** was introduced by Raul M. Grijalva (D-AZ) and Pat Meehan (R-PA) and already has 130 bipartisan cosponsors. ***We encourage all senators and representatives to cosponsor S.569/H.R. 502 for permanent reauthorization of LWCF.***

Forests in the United States lose more than 500,000 acres of privately-owned timberland to development each year. The Forest Legacy Program provides an alternative. The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) of the USDA Forest Service provides matching grants to states in order to purchase conservation easements for important forest lands. Projects sponsored by this program require a minimum 25% non-federal match to receive funding and have conserved nearly 2 million acres since its inception.

In FY 2016, Forest Legacy was funded at \$63 million. It is unclear what funding it will receive in FY 2018.

The Alliance's goals regarding FLP are to increase the funding and to allow the program to be used more flexibly, with grants given to land trusts for the purchase of conservation easements. These easements would help protect important natural resource lands through private ownership and management. The Forest Legacy Management Flexibility Act, **H.R. 344**, introduced by Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY).

We encourage all representatives to cosponsor this legislation that would give states the option of allowing land trusts to acquire easements with Forest Legacy funds.

The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act), administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), was funded at \$53 million in FY2016. Many land trusts partner with state and federal agencies to acquire conservation easements to protect imperiled wildlife.

EPA Regional Funding

President Trump's FY 2018 budget proposed eliminating several regional restoration programs in the EPA's budget, such as the Chesapeake Bay Program, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Long Island Sound Program and Puget Sound Partnership.

These popular, bipartisan regional programs provide grants to state and local partners directly supporting on-the-ground projects that help local governments, farmers, small businesses and nonprofits protect and restore these key ecosystems. These federal programs also create economic revitalization. For example, for every \$1 invested in Great Lakes restoration, \$2 are generated in economic activity.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), funded at \$300 million per year, has successfully funded efforts that improved water quality in the lakes and its tributaries, restored important habitat and removed invasive species. GLRI was reauthorized in 2016 for five years.

The Chesapeake Bay Program, funded at \$73 million, is the glue that holds together the effort by state and local agencies to clean up pollution in local rivers and streams in the Chesapeake watershed.

We encourage Congress to restore funding for these critical regional restoration programs.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)

Congress enacted the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) in 1989 to incentivize partnerships for restoring and protecting wetland habitat in North America. NAWCA grants are approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission and administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These projects create 7,500 new jobs annually. NAWCA raises \$3 from its partners for every \$1 it receives in federal funding.

In mid-February, Rob Wittman (R-VA) and Mike Thompson (D-CA) introduced **H.R. 1099**, to reauthorize the program for five years and dedicate \$50 million per year. The program has touched almost 27 million acres in North America with matching and nonmatching funds. ***We encourage all representatives to cosponsor this legislation that has beneficial environmental and economic outcomes.***