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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 19, 2011

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James P. Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Moran,

We are writing to express our strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and its component programs in fiscal year (FY) 2012, ensuring that critical natural resource lands, outdoor recreation opportunities and working forests are not lost forever. As you begin drafting the FY12 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, we request robust and consistent funding of LWCF. This much-needed funding will support public land conservation across our communities that increase access to outdoor recreation while revitalizing urban parks and open space.

LWCF receipts are not revenues for general purposes – they are federal collections specifically authorized for conservation spending. LWCF is the only conservation offset from offshore oil and gas drilling in federal waters. Unfortunately, LWCF funds are routinely diverted from their original conservation purpose. This chronic underfunding has created a large backlog of urgent willing-seller acquisitions and recreational development projects, and has led states and federal land management agencies to postpone or cancel many important projects. By enabling priority fee and easement acquisitions and park and recreation projects through LWCF's federal and state-side programs, the Forest Legacy Program, and the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, the LWCF ensures that America's most special outdoor places are available for public use and enjoyment.

Federal LWCF projects provide vital protection to our national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges; battlefields and other historic sites; working ranches and forests; wildlife habitat; and other places Americans care about. Failure to invest in these places threatens drinking water, hunting and fishing access to public lands, active outdoor recreation sites and our unique American heritage. Further investments in ensuring recreational access to existing public lands

-- making public lands public -- for hunters, anglers and other outdoors recreationists is a critical part of the future success of this program.

The companion LWCF state grants program ensures that children and families have access to close-to-home by providing crucial support for state and local park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. The LWCF stateside program has funded over 41,000 projects including sports fields, outdoor recreation facilities and trails touching all fifty states, and critical needs remain in FY12. The Forest Legacy Program makes vital investments to protect the resources and economies of our nation's forests and the communities that depend on them. These investments are essential to sustaining jobs in the woods and retaining the character of traditional land-use communities across the nation.

These vital needs all can be accommodated in FY12 within the Administration's budget request. Recognizing that access to urban parks and community green spaces is vital for engaging young people and their families with the outdoors, that request also augments LWCF with a competitive matching grants program that focuses on parks, greenways and blueways in cities and urbanized areas. Increasing access to public outdoor recreation for underserved communities is vital to a healthy lifestyle and creating a lifelong bond with nature.

In these are very difficult economic times, we believe these LWCF investments are essential investments that will yield important economic benefits to local communities now and into the future. Consider the following:

- The Outdoor Industry Foundation reports that active, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy and supports nearly 6.5 million jobs across the U.S.
- Over 13 million Americans hunt and 33 million fish, collectively supporting over 900,000 American jobs and over \$6 billion in federal and state taxes.
- The 2009 National Parks Second Century Commission estimated that every \$1 in taxpayer money spent on National Parks returned a \$4 economic benefit through tourism and private sector spending. Annual tourist spending in communities near national parks totals over \$13 billion and supports over 250,000 jobs.
- Recreational use on national wildlife refuges generated almost \$1.7 billion in total economic activity during fiscal year 2006, according to a report released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In addition, LWCF expenditures bring cost-savings to federal agencies and the public over the long term by securing inholdings that protect water supplies, reduce fire risks, eliminate incompatible development, and support private working lands. Without adding to agency management costs, these inholding acquisitions contribute significantly to our ability to take care of the public lands we already have.

For all of its 46 years, LWCF has been a bipartisan program, and support for LWCF among the American public remains strong. A recent bipartisan poll showed that 86% of voters nationally support committing LWCF's OCS revenues to the program. On Election Day 2010, voters demonstrated their support for conservation by approving 30 of 36, or 83%, of new land protection initiatives. These initiatives generated \$2 billion in new state and local conservation

funding and demonstrate continuing widespread support for conservation programs that pay for themselves.

As you work on the FY12 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill, we urge you to consider the multiple public benefits that accrue to communities throughout the nation from robust investment in the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and we ask that you do all you can to include sufficient LWCF funding to meet these many urgent needs.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



CHARLES F. BASS
Member of Congress



MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress



JIM GERLACH
Member of Congress



G.K. BUTTERFIELD
Member of Congress



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