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PETERBOROUGH — A federal fund that helped finance the state's acquisition of land on Temple Mountain should have a bit more money available next year, after an amendment offered by U.S. Rep. Charlie Bass, R-N.H., restored funds that had been cut in the initial draft of the Interior and Environmental Appropriation.

The amendment, which passed in the House of Representatives on Tuesday, increases the appropriation for the Land and Water Conservation Fund from \$65.8 million to \$85.8 million. Congress created the fund in 1965 to safeguard natural areas and water resources using revenue from offshore oil and gas leases.

"Historically, the fund has been appropriated at around \$300 million or more," Bass said Wednesday. "The high was a little less than \$1 billion at one point."

In fiscal year 2011, the LWCF was funded at \$301 million, according to Bass.

He said the cut that was proposed in the appropriations bill would have reduced the amount for the LWCF to a level that hadn't been seen since 1965, the first year of the program.

"Land conservation is a very important part of the New Hampshire economy as well as the U.S. economy," Bass said. "We receive \$3 billion to \$5 billion from offshore oil revenues. To take less than \$100 million for land and water conservation is the least we can do. I hope the Senate will increase it even more."

According to the congressman's office, the additional \$20 million will be broken down to \$1 million for the Bureau of Land Management; \$4 million for Fish and Wildlife Service; \$4 million for the National Park Service; \$7 million for the Forest Legacy Grants program; and \$4 million for the U.S. Forest Service.

The Bass amendment calls for reductions in clerical and administrative accounts of the Department of the Interior that will offset the increase in the appropriation for LWCF. "There's about a 10 percent cut in there," he said.

Leaders of New Hampshire land preservation organizations said the amendment was a positive step.

"We applaud the efforts of Congressman Bass and his House colleagues to restore partial funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund," said Ryan Owens, executive director of the Monadnock Conservancy.

"They have demonstrated their belief, which we share, that protecting open space for clean water and air, healthy outdoor recreation, resilient ecosystems and quality jobs is not a wasteful

luxury but a critical public service."

In a phone interview, Owens said the fund has been used for some New Hampshire projects, including the state purchase of Temple Mountain and an easement at the Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center that is in the works.

Owens said it's important to note that the fund is not taxpayer supported, but comes from federal oil and gas lease revenue.

Meade Cadot of the Harris Center for Conservation Education said of the amendment, "I think it's great that Charlie did that. It's a lot better than half a loaf. It's still way short of last year's budget and what's needed, and I think Charlie would agree with that." Cadot said that in 1965, when the LCWF was set up, the intent was to set aside \$900 million each year of revenue from offshore oil and gas drilling leases. New Hampshire benefited immediately, Cadot said, citing the acquisition of Pisgah State Park using LCWF funding.

According to the Land and Water Conservation Fund's website, \$900 million in royalties is put into the fund annually, but "nearly every year, Congress breaks its own promise to the American people and diverts much of this funding to uses other than conserving our most important lands and waters."

Cadot said two of those projects are in the pipeline and could be hurt if LCWF money that's been promised isn't available.

When the Umbagog National Refuge was created, \$5 million was committed to protect about 20,000 acres of land bordering the refuge and within the boundaries of the refuge. Another \$1.5 million is to be used to purchase land.

About \$1 million has been promised for the Conte National Wildlife Refuge along the Connecticut River. Neither project is complete, Cadot said, and the funding could be in jeopardy.

"We're not talking about tax revenue here," Cadot said. "Nine hundred million is what's supposed to be spent and we're haggling over the difference between \$65 million and \$85 million."