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Editorial

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On Friday at the base of Mount Washington, a group of green interests — forest protection groups, government environment personnel and academics, among others — put on a birthday party for the Weeks Act. This is the landmark federal legislation, passed 100 years ago, that authorizes government purchases of open space for conservation purposes.

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away in Washington, Representative Charles Bass, R-N.H., was wrapping up a birthday present: an amendment to an appropriations bill, approved by the House, that adds \$20 million to the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The fund, launched in 1965, is a principal source of government money for conservation-related land purchases through the Weeks Act.

The move by Bass, which could be formalized in full House action this weekend, represents a shifting of resources within the Interior Department's administrative budget — hence, it merely reallocates existing resources. But, in the current Congressional climate his accomplishment deserves note, because it sends a positive signal to the Senate, which traditionally is comparatively more generous on conservation land spending, and it dramatically shows that some priorities ought not be abandoned even at times of budget angst.

To be sure, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is financed by royalty fees that offshore oil drillers pay to the government, is getting less than it could. The founding legislation calls for Congress to pay in \$900 million annually, but in all but two years much of the royalty receipts have wound up elsewhere in the government's budget. Still, thanks to Bass' initiative, the fund is pretty much assured of getting more than was in store — a comparatively modest \$65.8 million was in the original bill — and a separate amendment adds an extra \$5 million to the federal fund.

New Hampshire has long had a sweet spot for forest lands. The 800,000-acre White Mountain National Forest owes its start to the first land purchase authorized by the Weeks Act. Other important land protections in the state were made possible by federal funding, such as the 352-acre former Temple Mountain ski area and 1,200 acres of easements at the Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center in Greenfield.

Bass' amendment effectively honors those steps, and, modest as it may be in the grand scale of things, helps assure that other protections like them may be possible in the future.