

On November 1st, 2016, we submitted the following letter through The Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition:

Dear Senator/Representative:

As the 114th Congress looks toward its final months of work, we urge you to support the bipartisan agreement to permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) that passed the Senate in April as part of the Energy Policy Modernization Act of 2015. We support this provision and feel strongly that it must be retained in any final conference report produced by the House-Senate conference committee on energy legislation, or included in another legislative package this year along with strong funding of this critical program.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is our country's most important conservation program, supporting local communities and increasing access to the outdoors in every state and 99% of all counties. The program is overwhelmingly popular and has maintained broad bipartisan support over its 50-year history of successful, locally-driven conservation. Yet, in 2015, it was allowed to temporarily expire and then given only a short-term renewal, casting a chill over the long-term projects that make LWCF so effective. We cannot afford to risk the loss of this program again.

For the first time, permanent authorization of the LWCF passed the Senate in April 2016 as part of Title V of the Energy Policy Modernization Act of 2016 (S. 2012). We now have an opportunity to ensure the future of LWCF by making this provision into law—an opportunity which must not be missed. The LWCF language passed by the Senate, a commonsense bipartisan compromise crafted by Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski and Ranking Member Maria Cantwell, addresses concerns about the program in a balanced and reasonable way, keeping the oversight role of Congress intact and maintaining the flexibility of the program to address current and future needs.

Title V also creates a new National Park Maintenance and Revitalization Fund that is over and above LWCF—NOT taking authorized dollars away from LWCF—from offshore energy revenues. This agreement therefore addresses critical needs for our public lands on two fronts: improving existing facilities and resources, and protecting the integrity of those parks and other public lands from incompatible development through LWCF investments. The proposal also supports working lands, wildlife habitat protection, state and local parks, and other conservation and outdoor recreation needs throughout the nation. The provision further guarantees funds for sportsmen's access by incorporating the Making Public Lands Public proposal. LWCF funding is a critical tool for safeguarding our national parks, which are on pace to set a record for annual number of visitors in this Centennial year. The Senate-passed language represents the best opportunity for Congress to address park maintenance needs while saving our most important conservation program. Our National Parks and other conservation and recreation areas are not yet complete and face significant threats, which can only be addressed by permanent authorization and strong funding of LWCF.

Finally, the Senate agreement includes reauthorization of the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF), which was created in 1976 to fund the nation's historic preservation programs. The HPF complements LWCF with additional grants to the states to preserve their treasured places and reflect the diversity of each state's culture and experience.

We urge you to include the Senate passed bipartisan LWCF compromise in any bill that emerges from the energy conference committee or as part of another package in the closing weeks of this Congress. It is critical that the compromise language be kept intact, and any efforts to weaken these provisions be opposed. We also urge your support of continued robust funding of the program similar to last year's level as negotiations continue over FY17 appropriations. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a vital program to millions of Americans across the country and your local communities, businesses, and constituents need the certainty that it will remain as a robust and flexible set of conservation tools for future generations.