

- SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS -

DATE

Dear Senator,

From the Appalachian Trail to Mt. Rainier to local state parks and recreation areas, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been critical to protecting the best of America. LWCF protects America's great outdoors and maintains the economic asset that our federal, state and local public lands represent. Federal investment in public lands, including parks, refuges, trails, rivers, recreation areas and national forests, leverages state, local and private funds and drives a recreation industry that supports millions of U.S. jobs.

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and the millions of Americans we represent, we are writing to urge you to prevent any cuts to the Land and Water Conservation Fund appropriation in FY 12, support increased funding on a trajectory to the \$900 million intended for the program each year, and to ensure permanent and dedicated funding for this critical program by sponsoring S.1265, the Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act of 2011. This legislation would finally make real the promise that was made to the American people almost 50 years ago, and prevent further diversion of funds that are desperately needed to protect some of America's most important natural areas, including national parks and forests, working farms, forests and ranches, and state and local parks.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has protected many of America's greatest outdoor places, in all 50 states and nearly every single county. Access to open space drives economic development, boosts property values, and provides healthy outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and tourists alike. Furthering 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. Preserving historic places such as Civil War battlefields connect communities to their outdoor heritage. Protecting iconic landscapes ensures that our children and grandchildren enjoy the same opportunities that we do to connect with their natural heritage. Improving state and local parks, ball fields, and green spaces connects young people with healthy outdoor activity, right in their own neighborhoods.

Outdoor recreation, much of which takes place on lands protected by the Land and Water Conservation Fund, is vital to our nation's economy. Hunting, fishing, camping, climbing, hiking, paddling, backcountry skiing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, and other activities contribute a total of \$730 billion annually to the economy, supporting 6.5 million jobs (1 of every 20 jobs in the U.S.) and stimulating 8% of all consumer spending according to the Outdoor Industry Foundation. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce has placed the promotion of travel and tourism in its top five steps that Congress can take right now spur faster job growth in America's private sector. Our national parks and public lands are one of the greatest draws of both foreign and domestic tourists in the

U.S. Continued investment in these assets is crucial to maintaining public access and close-to-home recreation for all Americans as our population and urban base inexorably grows.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is based on a simple idea: take a portion of revenues from the depletion of offshore oil and gas that belong to all Americans, and reinvest these funds in the conservation of our vanishing natural resources. \$900 million per year flows into this account from the royalties paid by oil and gas companies, but only once over the life of the program has that full amount actually been spent on conservation. Over the nearly 50-year history of LWCF, billions of dollars in revenue deposited into the Fund have NOT been spent as intended and have been diverted for other purposes. Appropriations for LWCF were cut by 33% in FY 11 and face a 70% cut from this level in the FY 12 House Interior appropriations bill. Congress should ensure honest budgeting for LWCF and finally limit these funds to their originally intended purposes, for the benefit of all Americans and the places where they live, work and play.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has always been and continues to be a bipartisan investment that has strong support among diverse communities in every state. We urge you to prevent any cuts to the fund in FY 12 while supporting increased funding on a trajectory to the \$900 million intended for the program each year. In addition, we urge you to cosponsor S.1265, the Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act of 2011. This legislation will provide full, permanent and dedicated funding to LWCF while ensuring that protection of green space and watersheds keeps pace with rampant development pressures, from our most beautiful intact landscapes to our community playgrounds.

Sincerely,