Our country’s national parks and public lands comprise our nation’s most significant natural and cultural treasures. These lands preserve our unique American heritage and history, offer unparalleled recreation opportunities for hundreds of millions of visitors each year, and centrally define and unite us as a nation. These irreplaceable resources also are major economic engines, propelling a nationwide outdoor recreation economy that supports more than 5 million American jobs, contributes over $778 billion in annual economic output, and serves as the lifeblood for countless communities across the country.

These priceless resources face unprecedented pressures and threats – and the Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422) provides a targeted solution to maintain and enhance our national parks and public lands in the face of these challenges.

- Our national parks and public lands have been suffering from crumbling roads, visitor centers, and trails. Deteriorating infrastructure, exacerbated by increasing visitation pressures and inconsistent annual funding, has led to a nearly $12 billion backlog in repair needs in America’s national parks; this total increases to over $20 billion when backlog maintenance needs on other public lands are included.

- At the same time, inadequate annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund – the nation’s most important tool for conservation and public recreation access – has increasingly jeopardized the integrity of our public lands and impeded public use and enjoyment. LWCF full funding is critically needed to protect parks and public lands from the threat of development inside their borders; to connect landscapes for wildlife and fire management; to preserve water quantity and quality; to sustain working landscapes and rural economies; and to increase access for recreation for all Americans no matter where they live.

By addressing these two related challenges, the Great American Outdoors Act will secure the future of America’s public lands legacy.

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Legislation

The Great American Outdoor Act (S. 3422), bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators Gardner (R-CO), Manchin (D-WV), Daines (R-MT) and Warner (D-VA), would ensure our parks and irreplaceable lands are protected for decades to come. Specifically, it would:

- Direct non-taxpayer funds already being deposited in the Land and Water Conservation Fund – including $900 million in annual offshore energy receipts that routinely have been diverted from the fund for decades – to be spent only and fully on their intended purpose. Specific language protects congressional oversight of LWCF spending through the appropriations process, including the assessment of annual needs and adjustment of allocations according to changing opportunities and submissions from state and community partners.

- Establish the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Fund, which would direct up to $9.5 billion in non-taxpayer monies (unobligated mineral receipts) over five years to address priority repairs in national parks and on other public lands. The National Park Service would receive 70% of Fund proceeds; the U.S. Forest Service would receive 15%; and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Education schools would each receive 5%.

Status

S. 3422 was introduced on March 9, 2020 and is awaiting Senate floor action. As of March 19, 2020, there are 59 Senators cosponsoring the bill, including Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer.
The bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act (S. 3422) invests in the repair of national park and public lands infrastructure and in protecting and providing recreational access through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to national, state, and local parks, forests, wildlife areas, and other public lands. These investments are critical to reigniting local economies across the nation, creating jobs and helping small businesses get back on their feet, and providing urgently needed stimulus to the outdoor recreation industry which generates more than 5.2 million American jobs and contributes $778 billion in national economic output each year.\(^1\)

**LWCF Benefits**

- LWCF funds have had a direct impact on growing the outdoor recreation economy by increasing recreational access to public lands in every state and county in America. Increased public access to our national parks, forests, refuges, local and state parks, and other public lands means increased seasonal visitation and tourism and thus more spending in local communities.

- A just-released economic analysis shows that every $1 million invested in LWCF could support between 16.8 and 30.8 jobs.\(^2\)

- Additionally, research on the impact of the LWCF shows that $1 spent generates $4 in economic value from natural resource goods and services alone.\(^3\)

- In state and local parks alone, LWCF spending is critical to sustaining the $166 billion in economic activity, $87 billion in value added, and more than 1.1 million jobs these parks generate.\(^4\)

**National Park Benefits**

- The National Park Service reports over 325 million visits each year (FY2019 data). Over $20 billion in direct visitor spending is disseminated each year to local communities adjacent to national park sites.\(^5\)

- Visitor spending at stores, hotels, gas stations and restaurants supports nearly 330,000 annual jobs, contributes to tax revenue and over $40 billion in total national economic output from national park visitors.\(^6\)

- The National Park System is second only to the Department of Defense in the amount of federal infrastructure it manages. In total, the agency is responsible for protecting and managing over 75,000 assets, which include roads and bridges, trails, historic buildings, employee housing, wastewater and electrical systems, military fortifications, monuments and memorials, and seawalls.

- Investing in fixing national park sites could generate nearly 110,000 additional infrastructure related jobs.\(^7\)
Other Public Land Benefits

- Spending from visitors to our National Wildlife Refuges generates $3.2 billion each year and more than 40,000 jobs.\(^8\)
- Outdoor recreation on Bureau of Land Management lands support 47,000 jobs and add $6.8 billion to the American economy. In FY 2021, it is estimated that the BLM will provide recreation opportunities for more than 72 million visitors.\(^9\)
- Recreation retailers, outfitters, and guides benefit from our National Forest system, which generates $9.5 billion for local and state economies.\(^10\) The Forest Service is one of the country’s largest recreation providers, managing 10,000 campgrounds, 159,000 miles of trails, 750 rental cabins, 2,000 trailheads, 130 visitor centers, 2,150 day-use and boating and fishing sites, and day-to-day information and permit sales.
- According to a 2018 analysis, Forest Service resource management investments in program areas such as infrastructure construction and maintenance, firefighting, ecosystem restoration, research and development, fuels treatments, Job Corps, salaries, etc. contributed 136,450 jobs across the nation; or 19 jobs per $1 million invested.\(^11\)
- America’s hunters, anglers, and target shooters contribute $119 billion annually to the U.S. economy and support 1.6 million jobs.\(^12\)
- Protecting working forests through the LWCF’s Forest Legacy Program keeps mills in operation, generating jobs in the woods and capital in rural communities. Working forests support more than 2.4 million jobs and contribute $115 billion toward the GDP.\(^13\)
- In all 50 states and U.S. territories, our national, state, and local parks, forests, wildlife areas, and other public lands provide clean drinking water, disaster risk reduction, point and nonpoint source remediation, coastal resiliency, carbon sequestration, and public land improvements, typically at a significant cost savings. For example, within the four-state Highlands region (CT, NY, NJ, PA) a $55 million LWCF investment protected water supplies for 2 million residents of northern New Jersey. Continued conservation in the Highlands is a key strategy in the effort to avoid long-term water treatment costs estimated at $50 billion.\(^14\)

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1 Bureau of Economic Analysis, FY2017
2 [Link](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341554349_Employment_Impacts_of_Conservation_Spending)
5 National Park Service: [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm)
7 The Cadmus Group: [https://cadmusgroup.com/papers-reports/restoring-parks-creating-jobs/](https://cadmusgroup.com/papers-reports/restoring-parks-creating-jobs/)
8 US Fish and Wildlife Service: [https://www.fws.gov/economics/divisionpublications/bankingonnatureimpacts.aspx](https://www.fws.gov/economics/divisionpublications/bankingonnatureimpacts.aspx)
11 US Forest Service
13 National Association of Forest Owners: [https://nafoalliance.org/issues/working-forests/](https://nafoalliance.org/issues/working-forests/)
14 Sierra Club: [https://www.highlands.state.nj.us/master/draft_plan_comments/11711.pdf](https://www.highlands.state.nj.us/master/draft_plan_comments/11711.pdf)
LWCF Success in Washington
The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has provided funding to help protect some of Washington’s most special places and ensure recreational access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. Washington has received approximately $726.2 million in LWCF funding over the past five decades, protecting places such as the Mount Rainier and Olympic National Parks, Pacific Crest Trail, Cascade Ecosystems, Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Skagit Wild and Scenic River.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP) grants are also funded under LWCF, to help protect working forests. The FLP cost-share funding supports timber sector jobs and sustainable forest operations while enhancing wildlife habitat, water quality and recreation. For example, the FLP contributed to places such as the Mount Saint Helens Forest in Washington County and Issaquah Creek Headwaters in King County. The FLP assists states and private forest owners to maintain working forest lands through matching grants for permanent conservation easement and fee acquisitions, and has leveraged approximately $53 million in federal funds to invest in Washington’s forests, while protecting air and water quality, wildlife habitat, access for recreation and other public benefits provided by forests.

LWCF state assistance grants have further supported hundreds of projects across Washington’s state and local parks including Sacagawea Heritage Trail in Benton County, Fallen Leaf Lake in Clark County and Tacoma Narrows in Pierce County.

Economic Benefits
Active outdoor recreation is an important part of the Washington economy. The Outdoor Industry Association has found that active outdoor recreation contributes $26.2 billion annually in consumer spending to Washington’s economy, supports 201,000 jobs which generate $7.6 billion in wages and salaries and produces $2.3 billion annually in state and local tax revenue. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that each year over 2.7 million people participate in hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching in Washington contributing over $3 billion to the state economy.
LWCF in Washington

Yakima River

The Yakima River is Washington’s only Blue Ribbon River, attracting anglers from all over the world. LWCF funding has been key to protecting the headwaters of the Yakima River within the Wenatchee National Forest, ensuring water quality and habitat for salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. LWCF has also helped ensure public access to the river for angling, rafting, kayaking and other outdoor recreation. The project has been ranked a national priority in 2017, and funding is needed to continue to ensure this world-class outdoor resource is protected for future generations.

Fiscal Year 2020 Agency Priority Project List for Washington

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<th>Agency</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>FLP</td>
<td>Yacolt Forest Phase I</td>
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<td>Murray, Cantwell/Herrera Beutler</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Status of the Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 2019, permanent authorization of LWCF was secured as part of S. 47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Passage of the Dingell Act ensures that LWCF no longer faces the uncertainty of potential expiration, and that the unique structure and inflow of funds to LWCF is protected. The focus is now on permanent full funding for LWCF – ensuring that each year the $900 million deposited into the LWCF account actually goes towards conservation and recreation priorities. Over the 55 years of the program, over $22 billion has been diverted from LWCF to other, unknown purposes. That means that our public lands, waters, and historic sites have been put in peril. As open space continues to shrink, LWCF investments become even more critical to providing the outdoor opportunities for all future generations.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act – S. 1081 and H.R. 3195 – have passed through their respective committees and are ready for floor votes in both chambers.

www.lwcfcoalition.org

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Note - All approximate totals derived from appropriations bills - Forest Legacy Program & Sec. 6 funded from LWCF starting in 2004

LWCF is a simple idea: that a portion of offshore drilling fees should be used to protect important land and water for all Americans. These are not taxpayer dollars. Unfortunately, the promise of LWCF has been broken. The program is authorized to receive up to $900 million each year—but most of these funds have been diverted elsewhere. Now is the time to fix this and ensure that funds retained in the LWCF account are used for their intended conservation and recreation purposes.

LWCF supports the acquisition of land and conservation easements to protect our national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, trails, and BLM sites, grants funds to the states for local and state park needs, protects critical wildlife habitat, watersheds and recreational access, and conserves working farms, ranches and forestlands that enhance local economies.