

THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT

S. 3422

Issue Overview

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.



Road repairs in Yellowstone National Park.
(Credit: The Pew Charitable Trusts)

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

¹ Bureau of Economic Analysis data reported for 2017. Available at https://www.bea.gov/system/files/2019-09/orsa0919_1.pdf

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%.



Hunting on the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River, Montana (Credit: Bob Wick/BLM)



Rafting in the New River Gorge, West Virginia (Credit: Kent Mason)

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.

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THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS ACT

ECONOMIC BENEFITS



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

¹ Bureau of Economic Analysis, FY2017

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341554349_Employment_Impacts_of_Conservation_Spending

³ The Trust for Public Land: <https://www.tpl.org/return-investment-land-and-water-conservation-fund>

⁴ National Recreation and Park Association: <https://www.nrpa.org/siteassets/research/economic-impact-study-summary-2020.pdf>

⁵ National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/2019-visitation-numbers.htm>

⁶ National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>

⁷ The Cadmus Group: <https://cadmusgroup.com/papers-reports/restoring-parks-creating-jobs/>

⁸ US Fish and Wildlife Service: <https://www.fws.gov/economics/divisionpublications/bankingonnatureimpacts.asp>

⁹ Bureau of Land Management: <https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/SoundInvest2019-6pages-FINAL-083019.pdf>

¹⁰ US Forest Service: <https://www.fs.fed.us/emc/economics/documents/at-a-glance/benefits-to-people/nfs/BTP-NationalForestSystem.pdf>

¹¹ US Forest Service

¹² Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation: http://congressionalsportsmen.org/uploads/home/CSF_Sportsmens_Economic_Impact_Infographic.pdf

¹³ National Association of Forest Owners: <https://nafoalliance.org/issues/working-forests/>

¹⁴ Sierra Club: https://www.highlands.state.nj.us/master/draft_plan_comments/11711.pdf

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WASHINGTON

Our Land, Our Water, Our Heritage



LWCF Funded Places in Washington

Federal Program

Alpine Lakes Wilderness
Columbia NWR
*Columbia River Gorge NSA
Cowlitz Canyon Preserve
Dungeness NWR
Ebey's Landing NHR
Fishtrap Lake Conservation Area
Grays Harbor NWR
Julia Hansen NWR
Kaniksu NF
Lake Chelan NRA
*Lewis and Clark NHP
Point Colville ACEC
McNary NWR
Moses Coulee
Mt. St. Helens NVM
Mt Baker-Snoqualmie NF
Mount Rainier NP
MTSG/I-90/Cascades
Nisqually NWR
North Cascades NP
*Northwest NSR
Olympic NF
Olympic NP
Pacific Northwest NST
*Pacific Crest NST
*Pacific NW Streams
Protection Island NWR
Quinalt Indian Reservation
Ridgefield NWR
Rock Creek Watershed
San Juan Island NHP
San Juan Islands NWR
Skagit WSR
Turnbull NWR
Upper Crab Creek
Washington Cascades-Yakima River Watershed
*Walla-Walla-Whitman NF
Washington State Land Exchange
Wenatchee NF
White Salmon WSR
Willapa NWR
Yakima River Canyon

Federal Total \$ 458,700,000

Forest Legacy Program \$ 53,000,000

Habitat Conservation (Sec. 6) \$ 134,200,000

State & Local Program
Total State Grants \$ 78,300,000

Total \$ 726,200,000

*multistate project

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.



Recreation at White Salmon WSR Credit: USFWS
Top: North Cascades NP Credit: NPS

**SUPPORT FULL AND PERMANENT FUNDING FOR
THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND**

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

Agency	Project	Amount	Delegation
FWS	Steigerwald Lake NWR	\$1,900,000	Murray, Cantwell/Herrera Beutler
FWS	Willapa NWR	\$1,500,000	Murray, Cantwell/Herrera Beutler
NPS	Lewis and Clark NHP	\$2,555,000	Murray, Cantwell/Herrera Beutler
FS	Washington Cascades; Okanogan-Wenatchee	\$1,800,000	Murray, Cantwell/Schrier
FLP	DeWatto Headwaters Forest Phase II	\$5,250,000	Murray, Cantwell/Kilmer
FLP	Yacolt Forest Phase I	\$4,500,000	Murray, Cantwell/Herrera Beutler

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.



Ranger tour at Olympic NP
Credit: NPS

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.



www.lwcfcoalition.org