



Congressman Lee M. Zeldin

First Congressional District of New York

March 9, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker,

More than fifty years ago, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1964 established America's most successful conservation and recreation program. This law was designed to assure our growing population that outdoor recreation lands and recreation sites would be secured, on a pay-as-you-go basis, for future Americans' requirements.

Since its enactment, the LWCF has proven to be a remarkably successful conservation and outdoor recreation program at all levels – local, state, and federal. We are grateful that Congress reauthorized the program in 2015 for three years. As we count down once again to the deadline on expiration of this critical investment tool on September 30, we are writing with some urgency to express our strong support for LWCF; to note the strong and continuing bipartisan agreement in the Senate and equally strong bipartisan support in the House; to ask for your help in ensuring that the program does not lapse; and to urge that its permanent reauthorization be enacted this session before it expires.

Investments in LWCF support public land conservation and ensure access to the outdoors for all Americans, in rural communities and cities alike. It has created outdoor recreation opportunities in every state and 98 percent of counties across the country, opening up key areas for hunting, fishing, and other recreational access; supporting working forests and ranches; and acquiring inholdings and protecting critical lands in national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, Civil War battlefields, and other federal areas. The State and Local Grants Program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions in cities, counties, and rural towns as well as recreational facilities and trail corridors. It is the government's primary investment tool for ensuring that children and families have access to close-to-home recreation, having funded over 42,000 projects including sports fields, outdoor recreation facilities, and trails. The Section 6 grants program provides states and counties with essential resources for habitat conservation that in turn allows for appropriate economic development. The Forest Legacy Program provides matching grants to state that help maintain critical forestry jobs while protecting outdoor resources, recreational access, and local economies. And the American Battlefield Protection Program provides grants to assist state, local and private partners who are working to protect the sacred ground of our history.

As our nation continues down the path towards economic recovery, the LWCF should be permanently reauthorized. Additionally, honest budgeting is needed to ensure robust and consistent funding for LWCF, so it can continue to play a strong role in revitalizing local communities. America's outdoor recreation, conservation, and preservation economies contribute \$1.06 trillion to the nation's economy each year and support 9.4 million American jobs (1 out of every 15 jobs in the U.S.). Support for public lands among the American public remains consistently and overwhelmingly strong.

As you know, LWCF uses no taxpayer dollars. Instead, LWCF funds are primarily derived from oil and gas receipts paid to the federal government by energy companies that extract publicly-owned resources from the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). Congress created LWCF as a bipartisan promise to return precious resources back to the American public by using these funds specifically for conservation and recreation purposes. LWCF remains the premier federal program to conserve our nation's land, water, historic, and recreation heritage. We must act to retain the program's authorization as soon as possible without any weakening amendments that would hurt communities in our districts that rely on this proven effective program.

We respectfully ask your help in identifying and securing a legislative path forward for LWCF. One possible option lies in the bipartisan compromise agreement to reauthorize LWCF passed last year by the Senate as part of the Energy bill and reported out again by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in its current version (S. 1460) of that legislation. This common-sense compromise honors the successful 52-year history of the program by permanently reauthorizing LWCF while recognizing important aspects – including public recreation access for sportsmen and others, conservation easements and working landscapes, project prioritization, and cost efficiencies – that deserve to be highlighted. We urgently hope the House can provide the leadership needed to ensure that permanent LWCF reauthorization along the lines of the Senate compromise is included in legislation enacted this year, and that you will work to ensure that the funds dedicated for LWCF purposes are no longer diverted for unintended uses.

As supporters of America's most important conservation program, we believe it is essential that LWCF's reauthorization into the future be sent to the President's desk as part of must-pass legislation. We must act quickly to renew this program before it expires on September 30, 2018, and we look forward to working with you toward that end.

Sincerely,



Lee Zeldin



John J. Faso



Elise M. Stefanik



Patrick Meehan



Frank A. LoBiondo


John Katko


Carlos Curbelo



Tom Marino


Claudia Tenney


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Chris Collins


Michael R. Turner


Mike Gallagher



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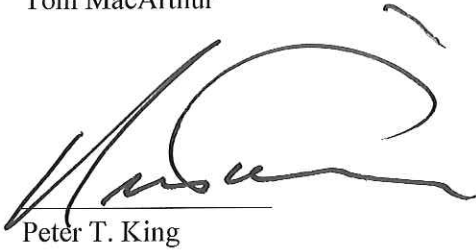
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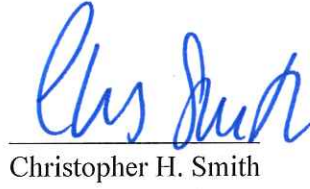
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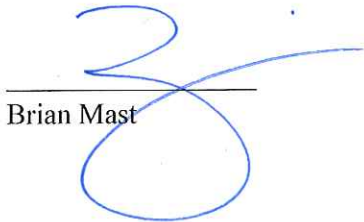
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