United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 9, 2014

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We are writing to express our strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Forest Legacy Program, and urge you to support these valuable programs in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

The entire suite of LWCF programs protect natural resource lands, outdoor recreation opportunities and working forests at the local, state and federal levels, ensuring that critical wildlife habitat, hunting and fishing access, state and local parks, Civil War battlefields, productive forests and other important lands are protected for current and future generations. As you begin the process of drafting your FY 2015 bill, we respectfully request much needed funding for these critical programs, particularly as LWCF is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2015. We ask that you include a strong investment in LWCF and Forest Legacy that will support public land conservation and ensure access to the outdoors for all Americans.

Since 1977, LWCF receipts have been collected annually to specifically fund federal land acquisition, conserve threatened and endangered species, and provide grants to states. LWCF was designed to not use taxpayer dollars and the LWCF receipts are not revenues for general purposes, but rather payments to the government specifically intended for conservation spending. However, more than $18 billion has been siphoned from the LWCF trust fund since the program's inception in 1965, diverted from their original conservation purpose. This chronic redirection of funding has created a large backlog of conservation needs across the country, including already-negotiated land acquisitions from willing sellers. The resulting uncertainty has led states and federal land management agencies to postpone or cancel many important projects.

We firmly believe that LWCF and Forest Legacy are important programs to ensure continued access to public lands for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities – an important and unique aspect of our American heritage. Continued investments in these programs help our nation's outdoor recreation, conservation and preservation economy, which supports millions of American jobs and contributes billions of dollars annually to the entire U.S. economy.

Despite a history of underfunding, LWCF remains the premier federal program to conserve our nation's land, water, historic and recreation heritage. LWCF and Forest Legacy provide a diverse array of conservation tools to address national, state, local and regionally driven priorities across the country. These include working lands easements that allow farmers and ranchers to continue acting as stewards of the landscape that sustains their livelihoods and working forest projects conserved through Forest Legacy keeping critical timberlands forested and accessible and providing jobs in rural communities.

LWCF is also a critical tool to acquire inholdings, expand public lands and protect national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, wild and scenic river corridors, national scenic and historic trails, Bureau of Land Management lands and other federal areas. The companion LWCF state grants program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. The LWCF stateside program has funded over 41,000 projects including outdoor recreation facilities, sports fields, and trails in all fifty states. The LWCF state grant is the government's primary investment tool for ensuring that children and families have access to close-to-home recreation and the demand is far outstripping the available funding. Access to local parks and community green spaces is vital for engaging youth and their families across the country with the outdoors.

These LWCF and Forest Legacy expenditures also create important savings for our federal agencies and the public in the long term because they secure land that provides valuable water resources, guard against incompatible development, support private working lands, and reduce fire risk. We hope you will remember that both LWCF and Forest Legacy leverage and complement state, local, and private conservation investments.

We look forward to working with the Subcommittee in the coming months to ensure that these vital programs are adequately funded in FY 2015 to support our longstanding commitment to conservation and to ensure that critical park protection and recreational development opportunities across the nation are not lost forever. As you begin drafting the FY 2015 Interior Appropriations bill, please include strong and consistent funding for both LWCF and Forest Legacy.

Thank you again for including strong funding for LWCF and Forest Legacy in your FY 2014 draft bill, and for your consideration of our request for FY 2015. We are grateful for your leadership in ensuring that funds necessary for our conservation and recreation needs across the country will continue to be available.

Sincerely,

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator

RICHARD BURR
United States Senator

JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senator

SUSAN M. COLLINS
United States Senator

cc: Chairman Barbara A. Mikulski
Vice Chairman Richard Shelby

DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator

BARBARA BOXER
United States Senator

MARK UDALL
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MICHAEL F. BENNET
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