

Testimony of Kathy DeCoster
Vice President and Director of Federal Affairs, The Trust for Public Land
Regarding the Land and Water Conservation Fund
and other Federal Land Conservation Programs
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
April 10, 2014

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on behalf of The Trust for Public Land in support of programs under your jurisdiction for the Fiscal Year 2015 appropriations process. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit land conservation organization working to protect land for people in communities across the nation. We are extremely grateful for the support members of this Subcommittee and other conservation leaders in Congress have shown for federal conservation programs during these challenging fiscal times. We recognize that the Subcommittee will again face enormous challenges in meeting the broad range of priority needs in the Interior and Environment bill this year. Our work in many of your districts and elsewhere around the country shows that there is tremendous support for conservation and access to recreation at the local, state and federal level, and the programs under your jurisdiction play a critical role in bringing those community visions to reality. Thank you for your support.

Federal funding is an absolutely critical part of the conservation toolbox and provides manifold benefits to the American people. Given the limited public conservation funding at all levels of government, TPL works to leverage federal conservation dollars, bringing to bear private philanthropic support as well as state and local funding to forge solutions to sometimes complex conservation funding challenges. The major programs under your jurisdiction that we count on year in and year out are the entire suite of Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) programs – including BLM, FWS, NPS and USFS acquisitions, NPS state and local grants, the Forest Legacy Program and the Cooperative Endangered Species Act Fund – as well as the USFWS North American Wetlands Conservation Act and the USFS Community Forest Program.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

For almost 50 years the Land and Water Conservation Fund has been the cornerstone that sustains our federal public lands heritage and remains today a compelling and urgently needed program. When Congress created LWCF in 1964, it dedicated specific revenues to ensure that funds would be available for annual land conservation and outdoor recreation needs. The major source of these revenues has been offshore oil and gas development in federal waters. LWCF does not rely at all on taxpayer dollars. Instead, revenues generated from energy development and natural resource depletion are used for the protection of other natural resources such as parks, open space, and wildlife habitat for the benefit of current and future generations. We (and, polls show, most of America) believes it is both logical and necessary that this principle -- using a small percentage of annual OCS receipts (which average over \$6 billion) as a conservation offset – be fully honored.

Investments in conservation and outdoor recreation make sound economic sense, too. The Outdoor Industry Association estimates that active outdoor recreation contributes \$646 billion annually to the U.S. economy, supports nearly 6.1 million jobs across the U.S., and generates \$39.9 billion in annual national tax revenue.

For these and many other reasons we strongly support the FY 2015 President's Budget proposal to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million, with \$350 million from discretionary sources and \$550 million in mandatory funds, for the various component programs funded under LWCF. In the FY 2015 bill, we respectfully request that you allocate at least \$350 million in discretionary funding as the budget proposes to support essential community-based conservation. We also recognize that the mandatory funding request requires additional legislative action, and we appreciate the leadership and commitment the Chairman and other subcommittee members have shown in seeking to address that need. Continued investment in the entire suite of LWCF programs as proposed in the budget is essential and we are ready to work with the Subcommittee to ensure that dollars invested are well spent on our nation's most urgent needs. We greatly appreciate the key role your Subcommittee plays in ensuring that program dollars are used for high-priority strategic investments.

Mr. Chairman, you and others have recently pointed out the urgency of finding mandatory, long-term solutions to fully fund LWCF as well as other federal commitments including Payments in Lieu of Taxes. Both LWCF and PILT represent longstanding unmet promises made by the federal government to the American people and local communities. They are good investments for local communities and complement one another. As each program seeks a more stable and long term source of permanent funding, we hope that Congress will follow your lead and take up this unique opportunity to permanently and fully fund both at the same time. We look forward to working with you to that end.

LWCF's programs bring specific and complementary conservation benefits to the American public. These key programs are:

Federal Land Acquisitions - Every year tens of millions of Americans, as well as visitors to our country, visit our federal public lands – national parks, forests, wildlife refuges and BLM conservation lands. Strategic inholding and other acquisitions in these federal areas through LWCF ensure recreation access and nature education; foster vital economic growth; protect clean water and other community resources; enhance the incomparable natural and scenic treasures that belong to all Americans; and frequently resolve complex land-use conflicts and produce management savings. Without adequate funding, the unfortunate alternative often is an irretrievable loss of public use and enjoyment of these areas and irreversible damage to the resources we all care about.

This is precisely the choice for numerous outdoor recreation and natural resource protection projects budgeted in FY 2015, including lands in the San Bernardino and Tahoe national forests in California, along the Bonneville Shoreline Trail near Salt Lake City, Utah and the Appalachian Trail in New Hampshire, on the Rappahannock River in Virginia, at the entrance to the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area in northern Minnesota, and within the Yakima River Watershed in Washington state. The Trust for Public Land is working in these and other areas identified in the President's budget and looks forward to working with the Subcommittee as you consider these critical needs.

At the same time that incompatible development within federal units is a mounting concern for the public, we have found that many private inholding owners are open to and quite often eager to find a conservation solution. Faced with uncertainty about the availability of LWCF dollars, however, many landowners find that they cannot afford to wait for that win-win outcome.

Adequate and timely acquisition of inholdings through the LWCF is critical to efforts to protect the nation's public lands heritage when these time-sensitive acquisition opportunities arise.

As the Subcommittee evaluates the myriad programmatic needs and measures for making programs more efficient for the FY 2015 Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill, we look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure that funds are spent wisely on strategic and urgent conservation priorities.

National Park Service/State and Local Assistance grants - Since 1965, the state and local assistance grant program has provided 41,000 in formula funds to states and local communities for park protection and development of recreation facilities. This program reaches deep into communities across our nation, supporting citizen-led efforts to conserve places of local importance and opportunities for close-to-home recreation. As TPL continues our work with many of these communities to meet these needs, we hope the Subcommittee will fully fund the Administration's discretionary request for stateside grants and that a mandatory full-funding LWCF solution will provide much-needed additional funding. We also support the allocation of LWCF funds to a new nationwide competitive state and local grants program, as was included in the FY 2014 omnibus appropriations bill and as is proposed in the President's FY 15 budget. This proposal is generating substantial interest in cities and towns across the nation and we look forward to working with you and others to make it a success.

National Park Service/Urban Park and Recreation Fund – The President's Budget for FY 2015 proposes \$25 million (included in the mandatory LWCF proposal) to fund the **Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program** (UPARR). Funding UPARR in FY 2015 would enable the National Park Service to issue competitive grants for improved recreational opportunities in parks and along trails in metropolitan areas throughout the country. From 1978 to 2002, UPARR grants helped bring improvements to parks and playgrounds in 380 communities in 43 states as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Grants have gone to places as diverse as Riverside County CA, Lawton OK, St. Paul MN, and Portland ME. Through our Parks for People Program, The Trust for Public Land works closely with cities to meet a goal of providing safe access to recreation within a ten minute walk from home or school. We work with schools and communities to design, fund and care for improved parks and playgrounds. The restoration of UPARR funding in the FY 15 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill would be a sound investment in the health and well-being of our nation's children.

U.S. Forest Service/Forest Legacy Program -- The Forest Legacy Program provides extraordinary assistance to states and localities seeking to preserve important working forests. Since its inception in 1990, the Forest Legacy Program has protected over 2.3 million acres of forestland and has leveraged more than the required 25 percent match. For FY 2015, the President's Budget recommends projects that provide multiple public benefits through forest protection – clean water, wildlife protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, public access to recreation, economic development and sustainable forestry. We urge your continued support for sustained investment in this strategic and successful program. Included in the FY 2015 budget proposal are numerous projects where TPL is working in partnership with the states to protect recreation access for snowmobilers and hikers, ensure jobs in the woods, buffer important federal and state conservation areas and provide strategic land conservation that fits a larger goal. Among these are the program's top priority project in Montana, which will protect the primary water supply for the community of Whitefish; a 13,000 acre easement in northern Idaho that protects drinking water for 500,000 people in Idaho and Washington; an 1800-acre property two miles from Zion National Park; a 6,700 acre working forest project on the Olympic

Peninsula along Puget Sound and a working forest project in Maine that represents 22 percent of the state's entire maple syrup production and four percent of the entire national output.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund --

We are grateful for the Subcommittee's historic support for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant programs, including the **Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF)**, which leverages state and private funds and has protected threatened and endangered species habitat across the nation. The Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) land acquisition program within CESCF has been critical to communities like Riverside County, CA and Washington County, UT where landowners and public wildlife managers are working together through integrated HCP's to foster species recover and appropriate economic development. In TPL's work with these and other communities, we have seen how essential CESCF federal cost-share dollars are to species conservation and local economies. In addition, The Recovery Land Acquisition (RLA) program under CESCF aids species recovery where there is no HCP – as, for instance, it has done in a partnership with TPL and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to protect coastal habitat for 14 listed species, including nesting areas for leatherback sea turtles.

Beyond LWCF, we urge the Subcommittee to provide adequate funding to other conservation programs including:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) --

We respectfully request your support for program funding at the President's Budget level of \$34.1 million in FY 2015. The **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)** provides much-needed matching grants to carry out wetlands conservation, restoration and enhancement projects. Our recent work through the NAWCA program will ensure protection of fast-disappearing coastal habitat in Connecticut and support restoration along the Middle Rio Grande. This is a highly-leveraged program with a substantial record of success and is another important federal conservation tool to support critical wetland habitat.

U.S. Forest Service/Community Forest Program --

Last but not least, we urge your continued support for the Community Forest Program (CFP), which the Subcommittee has funded since FY 2010. This program complements existing conservation programs by helping local communities and tribes identify, purchase, and manage important forestlands that are threatened with development. These locally led efforts can be tailored to the needs of each community, from timber revenue for local budgets to recreation access and outdoor education. Every federal dollar from CFP is evenly matched by funding from state, local, and private sources. The Forest Service has now approved 13 grants to innovative local and tribal projects in 9 states, and the program has generated significant interest from local entities concerned about the future of their close-to-home forests. Given the strong interest in community forests from coast to coast, we urge you to include \$5 million in the FY 2015 bill for this innovative conservation tool.

The programs highlighted here are critical to the future of conservation at the local, state and federal levels; reflect the continued demand on the part of the American people for access to outdoor recreation; and help sustain our economy and reflect the true partnership that exists in federal conservation efforts. As ever, we are deeply thankful for the Subcommittee's recognition of the importance of these programs and urge you to maintain robust funding for them in the FY 2015 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies bill. Thank you for your help and support, and for your consideration of our requests.