



Land and Water Conservation Fund

Congress created the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in 1964 when they passed the bipartisan Land and Water Conservation Act (LWCA). LWCF is now the primary source of money used by federal, state, and local governments to acquire lands for conservation and public access to natural areas.

Methods

Each year during the federal budgeting process, Congress appropriates money for LWCF from revenue generated by leasing offshore oil and gas permits in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS).¹ Congress can appropriate a maximum of \$900 million per year to LWCF as authorized in LWCA.¹

LWCF can fund both federal and state projects. The four federal land management agencies, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), identify priority land areas that will assist them in meeting their respective missions. Congress then appropriates money for specific projects during the annual appropriations process.² LWCF funds can also be appropriated to related federal programs. Recent recipients of funds include USFWS' Cooperative Endangered Species Fund and USFS' Forest Legacy Program.³

LWCF acts as a matching grant source to either state projects or state-identified local projects. These matching grants can provide up to 50 percent of the total project cost and are primarily used to provide outdoor recreational opportunities through land acquisition and facility enhancement.⁴ Projects receive funding through a formula based on state population and the project value to the state's formal recreation plan.⁴ The remaining portion of the project funding is matched by state and local governments, non-profit groups, or private firms.⁴

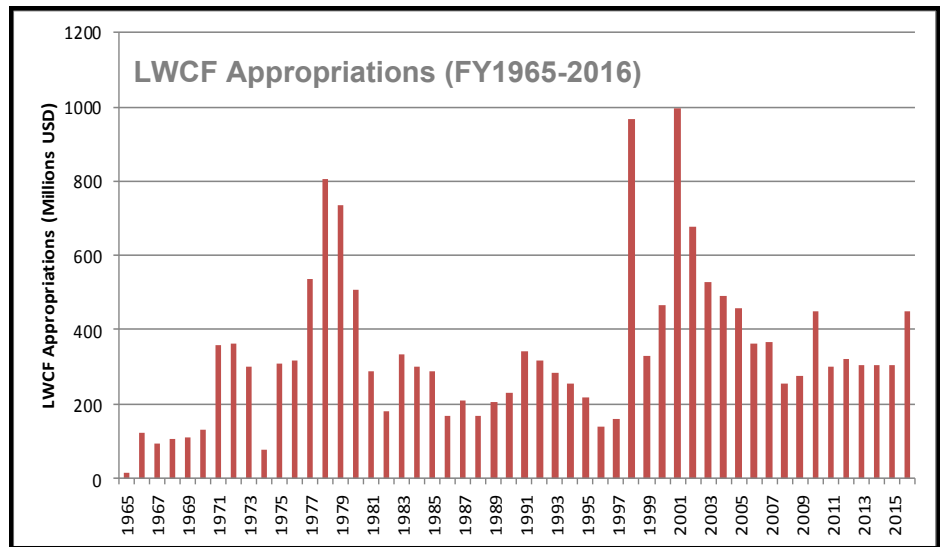


Figure 1. The amount appropriated by Congress for the Land and Water Conservation Fund for Fiscal Year 1965-2016. The maximum authorized level—900 million—has only been reached twice in the fund's history. (Adapted from the Congressional Research Service² and the Department of Interior's budget office³)

Results

Over \$16.8 billion have been appropriated to LWCF since its inception in 1965 (Figure 1).^{2,3} These funds have been used to purchase and conserve over 7 million acres as federal public land across the United States.¹ Almost one-fourth—\$4.2 billion—has been apportioned to states, territories, and local governments through states, resulting in over 40,000 projects that have conserved an additional 2.6 million acres.¹ Other related federal programs have received \$2.3 billion.^{2,3}

Discussion

LWCF has only twice received \$900 million in appropriations, as authorized in LWCA (1998 and 2001).² On average, Congress appropriates \$340 million—just over one-third of the total authorized amount.^{2,3} There is a considerable backlog of projects that do not get approved due to lack of funds.² LWCF's authorization expired in 2016, but Congress temporarily extended LWCF through 2018. Several efforts have been made to permanently reauthorize LWCF and ensure that it is fully funded.

Implications for Wildlife Professionals

LWCF is the primary means in which government agencies acquire new lands for conservation and recreational use. The protected land financed by LWCF enables wildlife professionals to perform science-based management of wildlife resources, contributing to the protection of wildlife species held in the public trust.

Land and Water Conservation Fund: Features



Expanding Federal Land to Improve Access and Manage Costs⁵

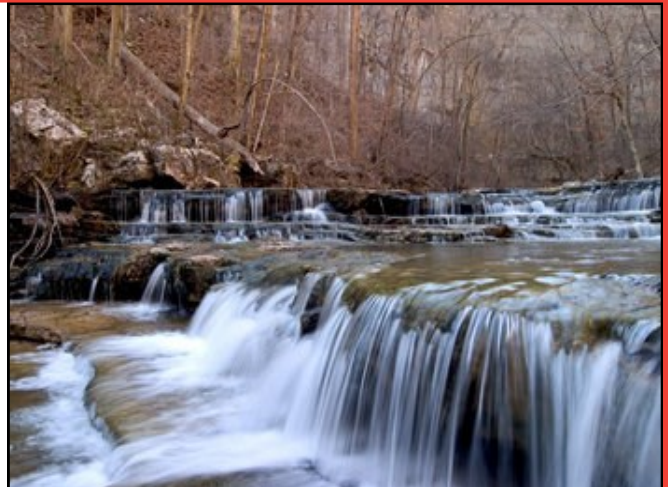
Elk (*Cervus elaphus*) herds are a huge draw to Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) and Wind Cave National Park (WCNP) in South Dakota. Hunting and tourism bring in state revenue and are a large part of the local culture. A 2,400 acre ranch adjacent to the BHNF and WCNP was purchased with \$7.15 million in LWCF funds. Elk herds consistently travelled between the two federal areas and the private ranch. By incorporating the ranch into federal property, the elk herd (which used the private ranch frequently) is more effectively managed and more easily accessed by hunters and hikers alike.

Elk herd at Wind Cave National Park (Credit: Charlie Baker)

The Forest Legacy Program⁶

LWCF is the primary funding mechanism for the Forest Legacy Program (FLP). FLP, which is administered by the U.S. Forest Service, provides matching grants to states for forest projects that involve working lands. The states buy easements from private landowners to ensure sustainable use and habitat for wildlife. Over 2.3 million acres have been protected through FLP projects, including the protection of the unique “Walls of Jericho” canyon and cave ecosystem in Tennessee and Alabama. USFS conserved 8,938 acres of the area through FLP which includes the headwaters of the Paint Rock River.

The headwaters of the Paint Rock River (Credit: Beth Maynor Young)



50 Years of LWCF⁷

To commemorate the first 50 years of LWCF, the LWCF Coalition, representing over one thousand recreation, outdoor industry, landowner, conservation, sportsmen, historic preservation, small business, and veterans communities released the LWCF 50th Anniversary Report. The Report analyzes the essential role that the LWCF has played in conservation programs and discusses the potential of the fund moving forward. The Report also outlines successful responses to evolving needs of communities and landscapes, and offers policy recommendations to address future challenges.

South Fork river (Credit: BLM)

1. National Park Service. 2014. Land and Water Conservation Fund website. <<http://www.nps.gov/nrcr/programs/lwcf/index.html>>. Accessed 10 Sep 2014.
2. Vincent, Carol H. 2010. Land and Water Conservation Fund: overview, funding history, and issues. Congressional Research Service. RL33531. Washington, D.C., USA.
3. U.S. Department of the Interior. 2014. Office of Budget website. <<http://www.doi.gov/budget/index.cfm>>. Accessed 11 Sep 2014.
4. National Park Service. 2008. Land and Water Conservation Fund State Assistance Program; federal financial assistance manual. Volume 69. U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., USA.
5. The Trust for Public Land. 2014. How U.S. Forest Service Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program acquisitions impact communities in six case studies. San Francisco, C.A., USA.
6. U.S. Forest Service. 2014. Forest Legacy Program: success stories: Walls of Jericho. <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/jericho_success_stories.shtml>. Accessed 12 Sep 2014.
7. LWCF Coalition. 2014. Land and Water Conservation Fund: 50 Years of Conserving America the Beautiful. <https://www.lwcfcoalition.com/S/LWCF_50thAnniversaryReport_FINAL.pdf> Accessed 23 May 2017.

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