



For Immediate Release
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Congress Overwhelmingly Passes Measure to Permanently Authorize LWCF

Bill now heads to president's desk

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PORTLAND, OR – The U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted yesterday to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

LWCF was included in the Natural Resources Management Act (S 47), which is the largest public lands protection measure to pass Congress in years.

"I am beyond grateful to the Oregon congressional delegation today. They have been champions for LWCF reauthorization for years, working tirelessly to get this passed so that our parks, public lands, and wild places can continue to access this revenue," said Coalition of Oregon Land Trust Executive Director Kelly Beamer.

LWCF is funded via royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling – not taxes.

"While volcanos, earthquakes and floods shaped the Columbia Gorge, LWCF funds shaped its protection over the last three decades," said Kevin Gorman, executive director of Friends of the Columbia Gorge. "Of the more than 100 hikes we lead annually in the Gorge, more than half of them wouldn't be available if not for LWCF funds."

Everyone in the Oregon delegation, in both chambers, voted yes on the measure – with the exception of DeFazio, who was stuck in Eugene due to snow. The measure passed the House 363-62 yesterday and the Senate 92-8 on Feb. 12.

In Oregon, LWCF has funded more than 1,300 projects totaling more than \$58 million. Here are some highlights:

- The East Moraine of Wallowa Lake is protected in part via LWCF. This project was made possible by a \$3 million contribution from LWCF's Forest Legacy program.
- The iconic Table Rocks outside Medford were protected with funds from LWCF.
- Thousands of acres in the Columbia River Gorge were conserved thanks to LWCF, helping make the Gorge the national treasure it is today.
- Western Rivers Conservancy's has conserved 19,602 acres of working private forestland threatened by development thanks to LWCF. The property is in Hood River County, surrounded on three sides by Mt Hood National Forest and bisected by smaller rivers flowing into the Columbia River.

The recent congressional approval for reauthorizing LWCF is the culmination of several years of effort by Congressional champions on both sides of the aisle and stakeholders across the country ranging from hunters, anglers, veterans, local communities, environmentalists, and more. They were working to preserve the unique character of this program created as a conservation offset for energy development. In Oregon, efforts to secure support for LWCF have been spearheaded by the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts.

Background on LWCF

Congress created LWCF in 1964 to safeguard natural areas, water resources and cultural heritage, and to increase recreation opportunities. LWCF is the only federal program dedicated to the continued conservation of our national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, wilderness, and civil war battlefields, as well as creating and developing state and local parks. Nearly every person in America has visited a park that has received LWCF support.

It was a simple idea: use revenues from the depletion of one natural resource - offshore oil and gas - to support the conservation of another precious resource - our land and water. Every year, \$900 million in royalties paid by energy companies drilling for oil and gas on the Outer Continental Shelf are put into this fund. National parks like Rocky Mountain, the Grand Canyon, and the Great Smoky Mountains, as well as national wildlife refuges, national forests, rivers and lakes, community parks, trails, and ball fields in every one of our 50 states were set aside for Americans to enjoy thanks to federal funds from LWCF. Over the years, LWCF evolved to include grants to protect working forests, wildlife habitat, critical drinking water supplies and disappearing battlefields, as well as increased use of easements. Most projects is spearheaded by a local entity. LWCF is rightly characterized as America's most important conservation program.

What Happens Next?

The act will now be sent to the president's desk. COLT and partners are optimistic that the president will sign S 47 given the overwhelming bipartisan nature of its passage through Congress.

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