

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DOMENIC BRAVO, ADMINISTATOR, WYOMING STATE PARKS AND VICE PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE PARK DIRECTORS

Good morning, Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Tsongas. Thank you, Members, for allowing me to speak to you today. I am Domenic Bravo, the Vice President of the National Association of State Park Directors(NASPD). I am also involved with numerous outdoor recreation groups like NASORLO and NRPA. My full-time job is being the Administrator of the State Parks in Wyoming. Having worked for state park systems in Colorado, Nevada and Wyoming, state parks have been my life's work for more than 17 years.

The National Association of State Park Directors met officially for the first time in 1962 in Illinois Beach State Park, and our primary mission is to promote and advance the State Park systems across America for their own significance, but also for the important contributions they make to the Nation's environment, health, economy, and its heritage. As you might expect, there is diversity between the State Park systems in our country. You can go from the range of California that has 279 areas, million-and-a-half acres, over 5,000 personnel, to, in my State; we have 55 areas, over 119,000 acres, with about 90 personnel.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was created by Congress in 1965 as a bipartisan commitment to safeguard natural areas, water resources, and our cultural heritage and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. This year, the Act is set to expire and many groups are advocating for its reauthorization.

There are two parts to the LWCF – one relates to federal lands (and related programs) and the other to state and local projects. Our national parks and monuments have received acquisition and development funds and the federal side has passed through funding to our state and local wildlife habitat and endangered plant conservation projects (called Section 6 funding) and timber land conservation programs (called Forest Legacy funding).

On the state side, the LWCF state assistance program provides matching grants to help states and local communities acquire and develop parks and recreation resources. Running the gamut from open space to trails to neighborhood playgrounds, LWCF funding has benefitted nearly every county in the US.

The national priorities identified in 1965, 1980, and more recently in 2010 continued to identify needs within local communities and the states, for additional outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The LWCF Act was designed to create close to home recreation opportunities and originally 60% of the funds in this program were specifically set aside for state and local projects. The remaining 40% was for federal agency land acquisition. Over the years, federal advocates have lobbied to change the program so there is no longer any state and local guarantee of funding. Since that time federal programs have taken over the vast majority of the funding. As evidence of this, since fiscal year 2004, the stateside portion of the program has averaged only 12.5 percent of the total appropriation, while the federal land acquisition and other federal programs have received 87.5 % of the funding.

Realigning spending with the original intent of the legislation would mean millions more spent close to home on priority projects determined by state actors who know best what local constituents want and need in terms of outdoor recreation. It is estimated that dedicating 60% of funds to the stateside would more than triple the funds available to local communities under the status quo. Ensuring state controlled planning(SCORP) that includes mandated federal agency participation is critical moving forward. Flexibility to State Liaison Officers for LWCF stateside funds for renovation, restoration & stewardship of lands and outdoor recreation is another important component of the act that should be reviewed. NASPD is also willing to find good solutions to address the more urban needs that have arisen over the years, as we know and understand the needs within our respective states.

We all recognize the current limitations on the Federal budget. But every member of Congress can agree that the dollars invested through the LWCF State Assistance Program for local projects like parks, ball fields, pools, and playgrounds which preserve those spaces in perpetuity are very worthy investments in the future health and well-being of America.

America's State Parks provide wonderful outdoor recreation experiences and unique historical, scientific and environmental education opportunities. LWCF has been a key reason for the vast diversity – from the expansive mountainous landscape in Alaska to coral reefs in Florida to the world's longest stalactite formation in an Arizona cavern to locations in Wyoming where emigrants first came to America and settled in the West and so much more. The mosaic of the natural resources, the cultural fabric of America, and the splendor of its beauty are enjoyed by 730 million state park visitors annually. State Parks provide important contributions to the nation's environment, heritage, health, and economy.

Permanent reauthorization of LWCF, with balanced and equitable funding of a stateside allocation, will have great impact today, and for generations, in meeting the purposes of the original Act.

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Tsongas, and members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.