



November 17, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop:

On behalf of the National Association of Counties and the 3,069 counties we represent, thank you for your leadership in drafting legislation to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The LWCF was first created in 1964 to utilize offshore oil and gas production revenues to provide recreation opportunities for Americans and protect our nation's unique land, water and cultural resources. Since its inception, the LWCF has protected more than 2.37 million acres of land and contributed more than \$3.9 billion dollars to state and local governments supporting more than 40,000 projects through the LWCF State Grants program.

NACo applauds the proposed legislation's commitment to robust funding for the LWCF State Grants program. Since the program's creation, funding for the State Grants program has decreased significantly. Increasing funding for the state program will enable more counties to access this important program. Counties across the United States utilize LWCF State Grant funds to leverage their own investments and improve outdoor recreation opportunities within their communities. LWCF State Grant funds have been utilized by counties to improve access to local public lands and waterways, create and improve campsites and other recreation facilities and protect threatened local landscapes.

We commend the proposed legislation's commitment to ensuring local governments have significant access to LWCF funds through programs such as the LWCF State Grants program, the proposed urban set aside and the proposed new Community Improvement through Innovation, Engagement, and Support Program. However, NACo believes that definitions within the legislation should be clarified to ensure that counties are eligible to compete on an equal footing for LWCF dollars under these programs. Counties play an important role in providing critical services, including building and maintaining community recreation facilities, and are well suited to leverage LWCF funds to improve recreation opportunities and the quality of life for millions of Americans.

NACo continues to advocate for a long term, mandatory funding mechanism to fully fund the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program (PILT) and provide budgetary certainty for public lands counties. We are encouraged by the proposed legislation's effort to address the significant impact federal land ownership and acquisition have on county governments by making a portion of LWCF revenues available to partially fund the PILT program. Federal land is not taxable by local governments. Due to this restriction on property tax revenue, public lands counties have struggled to provide adequate services to their residents and to millions of public lands visitors each year. This legislation will partially offset the impacts of federal land ownership on counties by including funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program as a part of the LWCF. While additional funds are necessary to fully fund PILT in FY 2016 and beyond, we are encouraged by the legislation's investment in PILT and stand ready to work with you to fully fund this important program impacting over 1,900 counties in 49 states.

NACo supports establishing and funding federal initiatives and programs to assist counties with preserving open space and farmlands, as deemed appropriate by the county. However, acquisition of new land by any federal agency should be subject to consultation with the county in which the land is located and should be consistent with county plans, supported by the affected county governments, and should result in no net gain in federal lands within the nation as a whole. To that end, we further encourage you to include within the proposed legislation a mechanism for federal land managers and county governments to work together to identify federal property holdings and provide for the sale of those lands to state and local governments and private entities, such as would be provided for through the reauthorization of the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act.

Additionally, NACo supports maintaining our public lands and enhancing public access to them across the nation. We appreciate your decision to include provisions that will ensure funds can be used to care for the lands already owned by the federal government and address the more than \$20 billion deferred maintenance backlog on our federal public lands. We further commend the proposal's commitment to improving access to federal public lands by setting aside funds to be used to secure and enhance public access to existing federal lands for outdoor recreation purposes.

Once again, thank you for your leadership in working to reauthorize the LWCF, an important program that supports county governments' efforts to invest in critical outdoor recreation and conservation projects across the United States. We stand ready to work with you and the Natural Resources Committee to reauthorize this important program.

Sincerely,



Matthew D. Chase
Executive Director