

Our Land, Our Water, Our Heritage

AMERICA DEPENDS ON THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

LWCF Mitigates Effects of Climate Change by:

- Keeping forests as forests to sequester carbon and protect watershed ecosystem services
- Buffering communities with natural infrastructure against climatic extremes and catastrophic weather events
- Providing strongholds for resilience in natural systems
- Protecting water supplies and natural water storage to assure clean drinking water, mitigate flooding and drought, and prevent and respond to wildfire.



Sterling Forest, NY
Credit: Greg Miller, AMC



www.lwcfcoalition.org

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a simple idea: to invest a small portion of federal offshore drilling fees towards protecting important land, water and recreation areas for all Americans.

LWCF is paid for using a very small percentage of offshore oil and gas drilling receipts. These are not taxpayer dollars. However, the promise of LWCF remains elusive. Each year the authorized amount of \$900 million from offshore royalties is deposited in the LWCF account in the federal treasury – yet far less has been appropriated to LWCF annually. In fact, more than \$20 billion of those funds have been diverted, vanishing into the general revenue stream with no accountability on where the money was actually spent. As a result, LWCF has been funded far below the authorized level.

LWCF directly addresses climate change, as one of our best and most straightforward policy tools for supporting America's natural resources. LWCF dedicated funding is part of a twofold solution to this critical problem: reducing the overall magnitude of climate change and safeguarding our natural assets as they adapt to the changing climate.

Climate Change and LWCF

LWCF keeps forests as forests to sequester carbon and protect watershed ecosystem services. Forest cover is being lost to development at an alarmingly rapid rate. According to a 2017 Harvard Forest study, New England is now losing 65 acres of forest to development each day, leading one of the authors to conclude that "land is our biggest asset in fighting climate change." LWCF is the premier source of federal funds for protecting large tracts of forestland, whether they are National Forest inholdings (some NFs are more than half private land) state and community forests, or private working forests that would otherwise be economically or ecologically unsustainable.

Strategic acquisitions buffer communities with natural infrastructure against climatic extremes and catastrophic weather events. LWCF acquisitions contribute directly to both risk reduction and recovery from natural disasters. The strategic conservation of coastal and riverine wetlands and forested areas in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), protects homes and reduces the amount of property in harm's way during floods, hurricanes and wildfires. Such green infrastructure and strategic risk reduction is much less costly than seawalls, levees, and other flood control structures.

Land protection provides strongholds for resilience in natural systems. Plants and wildlife need room to migrate and adapt to climatic shifts, and large unfragmented reservoirs of biodiversity to resist/recover from pests, invasive species, fire, sea level rise, etc. LWCF uniquely provides the tools to conserve large landscapes across jurisdictions and provide respite for species along migration routes with connected pockets and corridors of protected green space.

SUPPORT FULL AND PERMANENT FUNDING FOR LWCF IN H.R. 3195/S. 1081



Jean Lafitte NHP, LA
Credit: NPS



Cape May NWR
Credit: Erika Nortemann, TNC



www.lwcfcoalition.org

Hundreds of LWCF funded projects protect water supplies and natural water storage to assure clean drinking water, mitigate flooding and drought, and prevent and respond to wildfire. More than half the American population relies on forested lands to capture and filter their drinking water. Cost-effective, resource-protective LWCF projects have protected community water supplies in countless states. In addition to recharging aquifers and providing alternatives to costly dam construction, natural water storage projects like these provide associated benefits for wildfire risk reduction not available through gray infrastructure investments.

Sierra Nevada Checkerboard (CA)

In California's Sierra Nevada, land was given to railroad companies in every-other square mile parcels as an extra incentive to build the Transcontinental Railroad across the rugged mountains. This checkerboard pattern left a legacy of scattered ownership and fragmentation that presents daunting challenges in managing the forests to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. The consolidation of these checkerboard parcels has been the work of a joint partnership with the Forest Service, the State of California, and land trusts. Many LWCF projects have combined to achieve landscape-wide conservation in the northern Sierra Nevada. As consolidation of this landscape allows for comprehensive forest management and treatment, preventing and suppressing fire becomes much more efficient.

Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve (LA)

Encompassing six separate units in south Louisiana, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve boasts a wealth of historical, cultural, and environmental resources. Over the past decade, LWCF has funded \$28.5 million for the acquisition of wetlands and land, in and around the park. Jean Lafitte NHP lies within the Barataria Basin which has one of the highest rates of wetland loss in the United States, yet these wetlands are critically important for storm surge protection of New Orleans. In an area highly susceptible to damaging hurricanes and sea level rise, the Barataria wetlands are essential to mitigating the effects of climate change along the Louisiana coast. Moreover, these Park Service lands and waters lie directly in the service area of top-priority, multi-billion-dollar built infrastructure investment now underway to restore Mississippi River Delta wetlands. Their protection will maximize the effectiveness of those far-larger construction projects.

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge (NJ)

The state of New Jersey, the Army Corps of Engineers, and The Nature Conservancy have worked together to restore wetlands, which now includes engineered structures, as well as natural features like marshes, dunes and wetlands. The wetland restoration, funded by \$23.95 million from LWCF, serves as critical green infrastructure by absorbing and slowing down flood and storm waters. In a 2016 study, The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with a risk modeler for the insurance industry and others, showed that marsh wetlands saved over \$650 million in property damages during Hurricane Sandy and reduced annual property losses by nearly 20% in Ocean County, New Jersey. With rising sea levels and increased storm intensity, wetland and dune areas like Cape May NWR, are critical to the protection local communities along the coast.