LWCF Success in Georgia

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has provided funding to help protect some of Georgia’s most special places and ensure recreational access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. Georgia has received approximately $351.3 million in LWCF funding over the past five decades, protecting places such as Chattahoochee National Recreation Area, Cumberland Island National Seashore, Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP) grants are also funded under LWCF, to help protect working forests. The FLP cost-share funding supports timber sector jobs and sustainable forest operations while enhancing wildlife habitat, water quality and recreation. For example, the FLP contributed to places such as Pine Mountain in Harris County and the Altamaha River Corridor near Jesup, Georgia. The FLP assists states and private forest owners to maintain working forest lands through matching grants for permanent conservation easement and fee acquisitions, and has leveraged approximately $41.5 million in federal funds to invest in Georgia’s forests, while protecting air and water quality, wildlife habitat, access for recreation and other public benefits provided by forests.

LWCF state assistance grants have further supported hundreds of projects across Georgia’s state and local parks including Lazer Creek WMA in Talbot County, Main Street Park in Moultrie, Panola State Park in Rockdale County and Chattahoochee Bend State Park in Coweta County.

Economic Benefits

Active outdoor recreation is an important part of the Georgia economy. The Outdoor Industry Association has found that active outdoor recreation supports $27.3 billion in consumer spending in Georgia, 238,000 jobs across Georgia which generate $8.1 billion in wages and salaries, and produces nearly $1.8 billion annually in state and local tax revenue. Further, the U.S. Census reports that each year 3.3 million people hunt, fish, or enjoy wildlife-watching in Georgia, contributing over $3.5 billion in wildlife recreation spending to the state economy.
LWCF is a simple idea: that a portion of offshore drilling fees should be used to protect important land and water for all Americans. These are not taxpayer dollars. Unfortunately, the promise of LWCF has been broken. The program is authorized to receive up to $900 million each year—but most of these funds have been diverted elsewhere. Now is the time to fix this and ensure that funds retained in the LWCF account are used for their intended conservation and recreation purposes.

LWCF supports the acquisition of land and conservation easements to protect our national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, trails, and BLM sites, grants funds to the states for local and state park needs, protects critical wildlife habitat, watersheds and recreational access, and conserves working farms, ranches and forestlands that enhance local economies.

LWCF in Georgia
Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area
In 1978, the Chattahoochee River NRA was established to provide water-oriented recreation opportunities for the millions of citizens in the Atlanta metropolitan area. This urban river provides 70 percent of metro Atlanta’s drinking water. As the pace of urban development placed increasing pressure on remaining undeveloped lands, local communities along the river worked with the National Park Service to design a linear park south of Lake Lanier to the City of Columbus. LWCF has funded the protection of thousands of acres along the Chattahoochee and some 50 miles of river frontage are now protected; and a park system serving over 3.5 million people each year has been assembled.

Fiscal Year 2020 Agency Priority Project List for Georgia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Delegation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NPS</td>
<td>Cumberland Island National Seashore</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>Isakson, Perdue/Carter</td>
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<tr>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Chattahoochee Oconee National Forest</td>
<td>$620,000</td>
<td>Isakson, Perdue/Collins, Collins, Graves, Hice</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLP</td>
<td>Cabin Bluff</td>
<td>$5,250,000</td>
<td>Isakson, Perdue/Carter</td>
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Status of the Land and Water Conservation Fund
In 2019, permanent authorization of LWCF was secured as part of S. 47, the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Passage of the Dingell Act ensures that LWCF no longer faces the uncertainty of potential expiration, and that the unique structure and inflow of funds to LWCF is protected. The focus is now on permanent full funding for LWCF – ensuring that each year the $900 million deposited into the LWCF account actually goes towards conservation and recreation priorities. Over the 55 years of the program, over $22 billion has been diverted from LWCF to other, unknown purposes. That means that our public lands, waters, and historic sites have been put in peril. As open space continues to shrink, LWCF investments become even more critical to providing the outdoor opportunities for all future generations.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act – S. 1081 and H.R. 3195 – have passed through their respective committees and are ready for floor votes in both chambers.