LWCF Success in Mississippi

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has provided funding to help protect some of Mississippi’s most special places and ensure recreational access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. Mississippi has received approximately $152.5 million in LWCF funding over the past five decades, protecting places such as the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge and the Natchez National Historical Park.

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 the Escatawpa River Conservation Corridor in Jackson County and the Pascagoula River Conservation Lands. 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 $5.5 million in federal funds to invest in Mississippi’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 Mississippi’s state and local parks including Popps Ferry Causeway Park in Biloxi and Calling Panther Lake in Copiah County.

Economic Benefits

Active outdoor recreation is an important part of the Mississippi economy. The Outdoor Industry Association has found that active outdoor recreation contributes $8 billion annually in consumer spending to Mississippi’s economy, supports 79,000 jobs which generate $2.1 billion in wages and salaries and produces $620 million annually in state and local tax revenue. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that each year over 1.3 million people participate in hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching in Mississippi contributing $1.1 billion 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.

Gulf Islands National Seashore

Offshore islands with snowy-white beaches, sparkling blue waters, fertile coastal marshes, and maritime forests draw visitors from across America to this 160-mile seashore. Recreational activities range from exploring 19th Century forts to hiking in the designated wilderness areas of Horn and Petit Bois Islands. The Gulf Islands National Seashore was originally protected in 1971, and recently the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund has helped a broad public coalition extend protection to more coastal islands. Gulf Islands National Seashore is very popular destination, averaging almost 3.5 million annual visitors each of the past ten years.

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.

LWCF Appropriations FY2000-FY2020

Note - All approximate totals derived from appropriations bills
- Forest Legacy Program & Sec. 6 funded from LWCF starting in 2004