



**Opening Statement
Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.)
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing on Land and Water Conservation Fund
April 22, 2015**

“Thank you, Madam Chairman, for scheduling this important hearing today on Earth Day, to review the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is one of our nation’s most successful conservation programs.

“I want to say at the outset— I know that my colleague, Senator Wyden, is unable to be here this morning because we are starting a mark-up in the Finance Committee on the Trade Promotion Act, which will also pull me away at some point in time this morning. But Senator Wyden is a big supporter of Land and Water Conservation Fund, and he and I are co-sponsors of legislation to permanently reauthorize this and provide funding certainty. In addition, we will add his statement to the record and we very much appreciate his leadership on that.

“Fifty years ago, this act was first enacted into law—which I should point out was by Scoop Jackson of Washington state and as a suggestion of then-President Kennedy. And if you look at the original focus of the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the 1960s, as the country started to urbanize and to grow in population, people wanted to make sure that we were setting aside lands in those growing areas. So for some of my colleagues that represent more rural states or less densely populated states, the concept of the Land and Water Conservation Fund might not be as obvious to them. But I can walk around the state of Washington today, particularly within Puget Sound, and point to various parks and recreation areas that exist within the urban center today that are great examples of preservation made possible by the Land and Water Conservation Fund. They have made the urban center a place to work, live and recreate. And that is what is so important to me about the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

“To me, this hearing this morning is about our relationship to stewardship. We should remember on Earth Day that the Earth is lasting much longer than us, and the question is what good stewardship we are providing in the meantime. So this iconic program that has helped to protect many of our nation’s iconic and most popular national parks, forests and public lands is, I think, a treasure in itself.

“The fund has provided countless opportunities for hunting, fishing and other recreational uses, and has helped support state and local conservation.

“Many of us with significant public lands in our states have seen the impacts: protecting landscapes, providing for outdoor recreation and bringing strong economic benefits. The Outdoor Industry Association has estimated that outdoor recreation supports more than 6 million jobs nationwide and generates almost \$650 million annually in direct consumer spending. I must confess, I’m a frequent user of REI and probably have contributed somewhat to that number myself.

“In Washington state, visitors to federal lands in the state spent more than \$1.3 billion last year. So protecting our public lands is not only good for our environment, but also good for our economy. And that includes many of our small businesses.

“I think it is helpful to keep in mind the history of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and its funding mechanisms. A few years after the fund was enacted, it became clear that the initial funding sources would not be sufficient to fulfill the tremendous demand for land protection and for the development of new recreational opportunities. As a result, Congress amended the law to direct a portion of the revenues from oil and gas development on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) to the fund.

“The concept behind linking the OCS to the Land and Water Conservation Fund was based on the principle that a portion of revenues obtained from the depletion of non-renewable resources belonging to **all** Americans should be dedicated to preserving other natural resources of lasting benefit to the nation.

“It was a sound concept then, and it’s one we should continue to adhere to today.

“But as the matter now stands, unless Congress acts to extend that authorization, the authority to credit the Land and Water Conservation Fund with OCS revenues will expire at the end of this fiscal year. That’s less than six months from now.

“So I want to make clear that I will do everything I can to make sure that funding for one of our most successful conservation programs will not lapse. I have introduced legislation, as I mentioned, with Senator Wyden and others to permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund and to explore opportunities to move this bill forward.

“There has already been a strong vote in support of reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund earlier this year on the Senate floor, which is evidence that there is broad, bipartisan support of this program.

“So I hope that today’s hearing will be a good first step in helping us to find a way forward towards reauthorization.

“I know there are concerns that our nation should not be acquiring new lands while land management agencies have backlogs in deferred maintenance funding. And, observers of this committee know that the Chairman and I don’t always see eye-to-eye, but I hope that she and I can work through this issue.

“I don’t believe we have to choose between funding the maintenance backlog **or** the Land and Water Conservation Fund. And I hope that we can work together to find a solution.

“The National Park Service’s deferred maintenance backlog is the most-often cited example of agency maintenance needs, and I agree we must find a way to increase maintenance funding.

“But it is a mistake to assume that the only funding options we have are between land acquisition and maintenance.

“So, in fact, funding for maintenance is already authorized, and every year the land management agencies receive appropriations for maintenance activities. So there isn’t a need to force maintenance activities to compete directly for Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars.

“Nearly half of the National Park Service’s estimated backlog is attributed to needed repairs for roads and highways within the national parks. The single biggest improvement we could make in reducing the maintenance backlog would be to increase the funding level in the transportation bill for park roads.

“I think it’s also important for our colleagues to recognize that the fund is already a flexible program that offers many different tools to enable us to protect and improve public lands.

“The program is most well-known for allowing federal land management agencies to acquire lands within the boundaries of designated conservation areas, for helping to protect wildlife habitat and for providing new opportunities for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation.

“In addition, over the past 50 years, the Land and Water Conservation Fund state assistance program has provided more than \$4 billion through 40,000 matching grants to states and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

“In recent years, the fund has increasingly been used to conserve private lands, as well. For example, the Forest Legacy program, which helps pay for the protection of those privately owned forestlands that are most at risk from development, and I can tell you I hear a lot from a variety of groups in my state about their support for that.

“Similarly, cooperative endangered species grants provide funding to states to help protect threatened and endangered species and habitat on non-federal lands.

“Furthermore, over the past decade roughly **half** of Land and Water Conservation Fund expenditures have been for conservation programs directed by state or local governments, rather than for traditional federal land acquisition.

“So I do want to say, I support both the federal and state programs and continued funding for both federal and state programs.

“For those that are questioning whether enough funds are being directed to the state program, I think it’s important to remember that under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, better known as GOMESA, the states will be receiving as much as \$125 million each year in mandatory funding, not subject to congressional appropriations.

“While I definitely want to see something more permanent to make sure that money is spent in the Land and Water Conservation Fund, I strongly believe that the federal expenditures need to be a part of that equation.

“Again, there are not many programs that provide as many tangible results as the Land and Water Conservation Fund. I believe our nation can afford this level of investment. As I said at the beginning, it is about stewardship – it is not about what opportunities we take for today, but about what stewardship we are going to provide for the future. I hope all of us on Earth Day will think about stewardship.

“I thank the chairman for holding this important hearing, and I appreciate the witnesses making themselves available for this subject today.”

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