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Written Testimony Submitted To

U.S. Senate
The Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Honorable Jeff Bingman, Chairman

by

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Written Testimony of Stacey L. Pine
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For the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Regarding Investment Ideas for Clean Energy and Natural Resources Projects and Programs to Create Green Jobs and to Stimulate the Economy

Thank you Chairman Bingaman, Ranking Member Domenici, and other honorable members of the committee for this opportunity to submit written testimony on investment ideas for clean energy and natural resources projects and programs to create green jobs and to stimulate the economy.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a national, non-profit organization with a mission of advancing parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people. There are more than 6,500 park and recreation agencies throughout the country, majority of which are members of NRPA. Through our network of more than 21,000 citizen and professional members we represent the local and state park and recreation departments across the country.

NRPA commends this committee and the entire Congress for seeking innovative ways to address our nation's economic challenges. As you know, roughly two million jobs have been lost in the United States in 2008 and more losses are forecasted. Thus, we are pleased that you are in the process of developing economic recovery legislation that will put people back to work by funding ready-to-go infrastructure projects that meet critical needs in communities across America. Undeniably, it is the economic hardships of individual communities that have merged to create a national recession. Therefore, to be truly effective, efforts to diminish this recession and boost the national economy must start with providing resources at the local level so communities such as Silver City, New Mexico or Ketchikan, Alaska can stimulate their own economies and create jobs for their citizens.

As the Congress works to craft economic recovery legislation, we request that you include funding for the construction and renovation of parks and recreation by providing $125 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund state assistance program (LWCF) and $100 million for the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR). These programs are ideally suited to achieving the goals of the proposed economic recovery package by creating jobs, stimulating economic activity, and putting people back to work.

LWCF stateside assistance provides 50% in federal funds to states and localities as matching grants for the purchase and development of parks and construction of recreation resources. As a result of LWCF stateside assistance funding, over 41,000 athletic and playing fields, hiking trails, campgrounds, ski areas, swimming pools and boating facilities have been created in local communities. Since its inception in 1965, the

program has provided more than $4 billion in matching funds to states and local communities in 98% of American Counties.

Similarly, since 1978, UPARR has provided more than $270 million in matching grants to nearly 400 cities to rehabilitate and improve their parks and recreational facilities that have fallen in disrepair due to lack of investment. With UPARR grants serving as a catalyst, urban communities are able to make recreation centers and public parks safe, rebuild deteriorating infrastructure, and leverage existing resources to serve larger populations while also meeting new demands.

Our nation has a long history of investing in park restoration and construction as a way to create jobs and revitalize the economy. President Franklin Roosevelt created the Citizens Conservation Council (CCC) to build and fix up America's parks as a key component of his strategy to put people back to work during the Great Depression. Again in 1983, Congress recognized the important role park construction projects could play in immediately stimulating our nation's economy. The Emergency Job Appropriations Act of 1983 invested in LWCF and UPARR by providing $40 million to LWCF for development/redevelopment projects and $40 million to UPARR for rehabilitative grants and repairs. Under this Act, states were encouraged to rapidly fund construction projects that would create employment opportunities between September 1983 and September 1984. As a result of this funding, 572 LWCF development projects 126 urban park projects were funded in communities and major cities across the nation. Additionally, this Act increased employment by providing 35,000 jobs.

Unfortunately, in recent years, funding for LWCF stateside assistance and UPARR has significantly diminished leaving communities with lists of projects and needed repairs they are unable to complete because they do not have funding. Numerous communities throughout the country have capital construction and maintenance projects that are ready to commence pending matching federal funds. These projects such as new roofs for community centers, irrigation systems for sport fields, repairs to swimming pools, and electrical upgrades to park and recreation facilities would allow communities to preserve, rehabilitate and maintain already existing, and in some cases crumbling, infrastructure that provides numerous recreational opportunities for citizens. Many of these projects have designated local funding set aside, are poised to receive local approval or permits, and are suitable for small or minority businesses and contractors. LWCF stateside assistance and UPARR funding for these projects would allow construction to begin almost immediately, thereby putting local residents to work and helping communities ensure they are providing safe recreational facilities for children and adults alike.

In addition to contributing to local economies and repairing infrastructure, LWCF stateside assistance and UPARR projects serve to protect our environment and promote environmental stewardship while also creating green jobs. Grants provided by LWCF stateside assistance and UPARR have funded projects that contribute to reduced stormwater runoff, enhanced groundwater recharge, stormwater pollutant reductions, urban heat island mitigation, and reduced energy demands. These projects conserve our environmental resources such as green space and water. Additionally, these projects

serve to make communities and neighborhoods safer by protecting against environmental contamination. Businesses contracted to carry out these projects are in sectors that are part of the green economy. Through the services they provide jobs are created that conserve our natural environment and improve environmental quality.

However, park and recreation agencies also serve another important function: to improve the physical and mental health of citizens. By developing and restoring this local infrastructure, you are also investing in the health of local communities. Our nation currently faces an obesity epidemic and strengthening or improving local recreation infrastructure is necessary to combat this epidemic.

As you probably know, hundreds of parks and recreational facilities are in disrepair in communities across America due to budget cutbacks and the lack of federal funding during the past eight years. This seriously undermines local educational and athletic programs, the availability of indoor and outdoor recreational activities, and overall quality of life in communities. Therefore, NRPA also supports increased funding for programs such as Community Development Block Grants and the various transportation programs, such as the Recreational Trails Program, that would provide funding for local park and recreation agencies.

From the information I have presented to you, I believe it is obvious that LWCF and UPARR develop and restore local infrastructure in communities facing growing populations and demands. Investing in local communities and giving them the necessary resources to preserve, maintain and rehabilitate local infrastructure is especially important in times of an economic downturn, such as the one we are currently experiencing. For it is during such times that demand for local recreational programs and services significantly increases as citizens look for close to home recreation, entertainment and fitness opportunities. And for many citizens, local park and recreation agencies are where they turn for recreation, entertainment and fitness solutions.

In conclusion, NRPA believes that LWCF stateside assistance and UPARR are invaluable tools for Congress and the new Administration. We are confident that investing in LWCF and UPARR would immediately stimulate our economy through the creation of jobs, serve to protect our environment and provide much needed resources to communities to address local needs. Please include $125 million in funding for LWCF and $100 million in funding for UPARR in any economic stimulus legislation considered and passed by the 111th Congress.

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony. Please feel free to contact me at 202-887-0290 with any questions you may have.