

Impacts of the 2024 Election on Federal Conservation Funding

Speakers:

Alex Funk, Director of Water Resources and Senior Counsel at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

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THE CONSERVATION
FINANCE NETWORK

Navigating Federal Funding Risks and Opportunities

Alex Funk
Director of Water Resources



Lay of the Land - Administration

- Jan 20th – Unleashing American Energy Executive Order
- A significant portion of previously Congressional appropriated federal funding – particularly through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) remains “suspended”
- Focus of freeze and review on funding focused on energy, climate, and environmental justice, yet broad impacts are occurring
- Subsequent NGO memo



Lay of the Land - Congress

- Busy legislative agenda
 - Budget Reconciliation
 - FY25 and FY26 Appropriations + Debt Ceiling Extension
 - Farm Bill
 - Highways (infrastructure?) Bill
 - Water Resources Development Act
 - Public lands/water/forest management legislation



State of Play - USDA Funding



Significantly impacted by the federal funding freeze including funds to individual farmers and ranchers and technical assistance programs



Freeze on BIL and IRA spending is disproportionately impacting red states



USDA obligated and unspent BIL and IRA funds in limbo



Additional cuts to spending through budget reconciliation (e.g., at least \$1 billion)

Look Ahead- USDA Funding

Deemphasis/elimination of focus on “climate-smart” and sustainable agriculture practices

Wildfire mitigation and active forest management through the U.S. Forest Service via the Fix Our Forests Act

Farm Bill reauthorization

- Fate of Conservation Reserve Program
- Limits on permanent conservation easements
- Commodity Credit Corporation Discretionary Authority
- Fate of remaining IRA funds in the conservation baseline

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Post Election Update: *Protecting Conservation Funding*

Lesley Kane Szynal, Executive Director, Outdoors America
and Chair, LWCF Coalition



LWCF Programs



Funding Allocations Authorized by Congress

DYK: LWCF is not funded by taxpayer dollars!

LWCF

Federal Land Acquisition Programs
40%

State Grant Programs
40%

NPS

USFWS

BLM

USFS

State and
Local
Assistance

ORLP

ABPP

Forest
Legacy

Section 6

Highlands

GOMESA*

REPI-LWCF

Remaining 20% divided between programs based on project need.

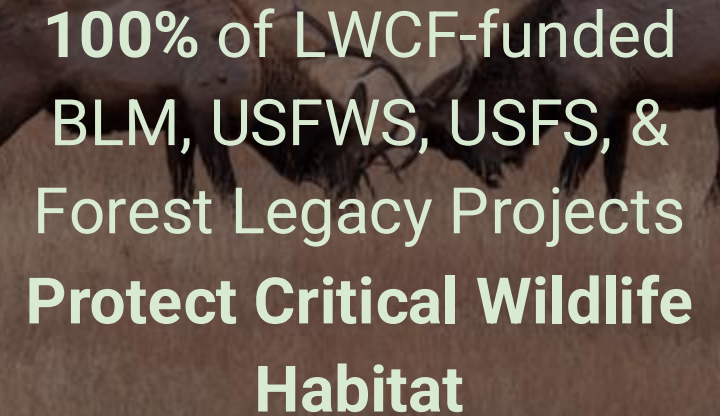
LWCF Investments - \$4.4 billion Since 2020

A photograph of two hikers with large backpacks walking on a dirt trail through a grassy, hilly landscape under a clear sky.

**99% of LWCF Projects
Provide Recreation
Access**

A photograph of a river with white water rapids flowing over dark, jagged rocks in a forested area.

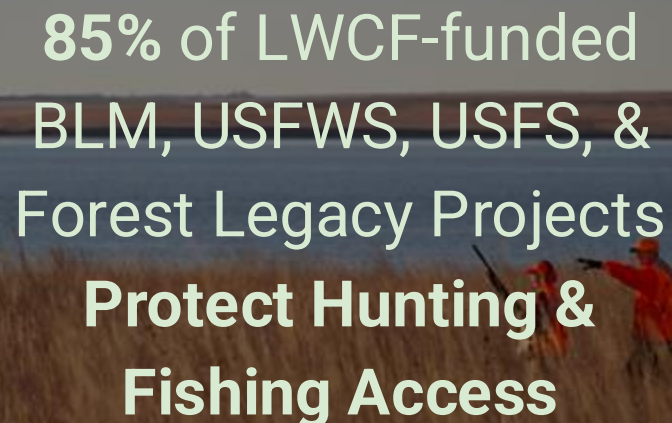
**100% of LWCF-funded
USFS & Forest Legacy
Projects Protect Water
Resources**

A photograph of two bison standing in a field of tall grass, facing each other.

**100% of LWCF-funded
BLM, USFWS, USFS, &
Forest Legacy Projects
Protect Critical Wildlife
Habitat**

A photograph of a modern park with a large, white, perforated canopy structure. People are seen walking and sitting on benches in the background.

**100% of LWCF-funded
ORLP Grants go to Local
Parks**

A photograph of two hunters in orange gear standing in a field of tall grass, looking towards a body of water in the distance.

**85% of LWCF-funded
BLM, USFWS, USFS, &
Forest Legacy Projects
Protect Hunting &
Fishing Access**

A photograph of a wetland landscape with a body of water, trees, and a path leading into the distance.

**Forest Legacy Program:
has Leveraged \$1.22B
from Non-Federal
Sources**

Forest Legacy Program/IRA



MT/ID FLP-IRA Project



Pee Dee Basin (SC) FLP Project

- LWCF Coalition-led effort to secure an additional \$700 million for FLP in the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022.
 - Ten year funding, over and above, annual LWCF funding for FLP.
- Focus on once-in-a-lifetime landscape level projects, tribal partnerships, and small forest projects.
- **\$559.6 million** invested so far in 31 states and 2 U.S. territories.
 - Over **564,000 acres** protected in just 3 years!

Administration State of Play



- Executive Orders:
 - Review on IRA & BIL grants (Forest Legacy).
 - Freeze/Unfreeze on federal grants.
 - Shift of focus and language.
- DOI Administrative Actions/memos:
 - Staffing freeze - likely to delay projects & hamper agencies.
 - NGO memo.
- Future Potential Actions:
 - Dingell Act adherence - 40/40/20.
 - Other

Threats from Congress



- Reconciliation (clawbacks) of IRA & BIL funding.
- Bills that would undo or undermine LWCF permanent funding similar to previous attempts from:
 - House Budget Chair Arrington
 - Senate Energy Chair Lee
 - Others
- FY25/26 Budget and Appropriations
 - Rescission of LWCF funding in annual appropriations bill.
- Incorrect allocations that don't follow 40-40-20.

Implementation EXPLORE/Outdoors for All Act

- Overwhelming passage of the EXPLORE Act, which included the Outdoors for All Act, was a huge bipartisan win for outdoor recreation and investment in local parks.
- DOI implementation of Outdoors for All Act is vital to ensure LWCF funding for tribes and local communities through the LWCF-funded Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program.
 - First direct tribal eligibility for LWCF \$\$.
 - Work with NPS & DOI to ensure correct implementation & defense of the program.



Bipartisan Opportunities



- Annual budget and appropriations.
 - FY25 Appropriations – March 14
 - FY26 Budget Administration – process next steps
- Additional private forest funding for the Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) – Farm Bill.
- Work with LWCF Coalition partners & members of Congress to spotlight the outsized need for additional conservation funding and the positive impact it provides for all.



Conservative Support for LWCF



ON MOTION TO CONCUR IN THE SENATE AMENDMENTS

H R	1957		YEA	NAY	PRES	NV
DEMOCRATIC	229	2				1
REPUBLICAN	81	104				13
INDEPENDENT		1				
TOTALS	310	107				14

TIME REMAINING 0:00

- We have been here before...
- LWCF has incredible bipartisan support. Original Conservation offset.
- President Trump Conservation Legacy - supported and signed the Dingell Act and Great American Outdoors Act.

YEA 73 NAY 25

H.R. 1957, an Act to amend the Internal Revenue Code, as amended

The seal of the United States House of Representatives is visible in the bottom left corner of this image.

Conservative Messengers



“We need to continue to invest in access to fishing and hunting and public access to public lands.”
Secretary Doug Burgum 1/16/25



““These funds invested in Western North Carolina will not only protect the natural beauty of the Blue Ridge Parkway, but it will also help spur recreation and tourism which are significant drivers of our local economy especially after the devastation of Hurricane Helene.”” - **Rep. Chuck Edwards (R-NC)** speaking about a recent LWCF project (below).

“The Great American Outdoors Act is a big win for conservation, it’s a big win for jobs, it’s a big win for our Montana way of life, it’s a big win for bipartisanship.”
Senator Steve Daines (R-MT)



Key messages/ways to engage



Key Messages

- Not taxpayer funds
- Supports rural economies and American jobs
- Recreation/tourism economy
- Conservation – efficient and cost-effective
- Locally led/ground up approach

Ways to engage

- All politics is local – tell your local stories/impacts
- Engage members of Congress
- Share stories in media
- Share info what's happening on ground



Work with the LWCF+ Coalition



- Utilize the LWCF Coalition if we can be helpful.
 - Creating efficiencies.
 - Supporting staffing needs.
- Project closing press and events - work with us and our partners!
- Capture and demonstrate the co-benefits and outcomes of projects.
- Spotlighting Success: Faces and Places of LWCF.



THANK YOU!

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Things To Do/Key Messages

- Share direct impacts of freezes with grant program managers and agency contacts
- Elected members of Congress should be engaged on ongoing federal funding freeze impacts
- Reconciliation defense for USDA and DOI conservation programming and funding
- Opportunities abound in legislation requiring bipartisan support (e.g., Farm Bill, spending)

