

Sample op-ed for NRPA members--

**“Full, Dedicated, and Equal Funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund”**

As someone who has been an advocate for parks, recreation and conservation in our community, I was really pleased to see that the House of Representatives included a provision in the energy bill that they passed recently that would provide full and dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

LWCF is a program that provides funds not just for our national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges, but also matching funds for states and localities so they can acquire and develop close-to-home parks, conservation areas, and recreation facilities.

For more than 40 years, a royalty paid by oil companies on offshore oil and gas drilling leases has provided hundreds of millions of dollars per year for this fund which funds the National Park Service to make dollar-for-dollar matching grants to states and localities to buy parkland, protect wetlands and water, and to build recreation facilities in close-to-home parks.

In our [city, county, state] we have received matching grants to complete park and conservation projects [provide examples here of local and state LWCF-aided parks]. These parks and recreation projects might have not been completed if we had not had the federal funding to complete them. But the LWCF is not a handout—every dollar from the federal government has been matched dollar for dollar, or better, by our state and local contributions. LWCF is great program that helps us buy more parks and do more for conservation in our community.

Unfortunately, not all the funds paid into the LWCF by the oil companies have been used for parks and conservation. In fact, in most years only a small percentage has been appropriated by Congress to the states and localities. This situation could permanently change for the better, however, if the full Congress approves the energy bill passed by the House. It is now up to the Senate to pass its bill and then for both chambers to agree on a final bill that the President will sign.

But Congress has one more important thing to be done with regard to this legislation and that is to not just include full and dedicated funding for LWCF, but to be ensure that the legislation includes a provision to equally distribute the funding they approve for LWCF between the state and federal sides of the program.

In the past 25 years, even though the LWCF has provided billions of dollars for conservation and recreation, the vast majority of that funding—more than 80% of the total—has gone to federal projects and purposes. Congress should correct this inequity and ensure that states and localities receive their fair and equal share of the LWCF appropriations.

As we have watched the environmental disaster of the BP oil spill unfold in the Gulf, it is good to know that there is one positive benefit for conservation coming from the drilling of oil and gas in U.S. waters, and that is that every lease to drill oil and gas in offshore waters provides a permanent conservation and recreation benefit to all of us in the form of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

I, for one, will be reaching out to my Senators over their summer recess to encourage them to do the right thing when they return to Congress after Labor Day. They need to and take up their energy bill, and with the House, pass legislation includes full, dedicated, and equal funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.