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Majority Leader Reid Includes Permanent Authorization of LWCF in Public Lands Bill

WASHINGTON, DC— Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) introduced the America's Great Outdoors Act of 2010 and asked for its consideration before the close of the 111th Congress. Included in the act is the permanent authorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a landmark federal program that finances public protection of irreplaceable, at-risk natural, scenic, historic, and recreation lands.

Since it was first authorized in 1964, LWCF has been the federal mainstay for purchasing threatened lands and waters, and providing public access and recreation opportunities, in America's national, state, and community parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and other public resource areas. Funded by a portion of the fees paid into the Treasury each year by oil and gas companies drilling in federal coastal waters, this program does not rely on tax dollars. Instead, LWCF simply reinvests proceeds from the sale of one federal asset into the purchase of another for the benefit of all Americans. Of the more than \$5 billion in offshore energy revenues typically received each year, LWCF receives an annual credit of \$900 million that can be put toward public land conservation.

America's Great Outdoors Act of 2010 will extend this vital program, which otherwise will expire in 2015. Reauthorizing LWCF will maintain the integrity of our public lands by continuing to provide landowners and communities with a public-benefit alternative to resource-damaging private sale and development of sensitive resource properties.

LWCF has strong support in both chambers of Congress. A bipartisan group of 26 Senators has cosponsored legislation (S. 2747), introduced earlier this year by Senators Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico

and Max Baucus of Montana, that would permanently extend the program and safeguard its annual funding into the future. Recently, Republican Senators Richard Burr (NC), Judd Gregg (NH), Scott Brown (MA), and George Voinovich (OH) signed a letter urging that Congress secure a permanent, fully funded LWCF before it adjourns. On July 30th, the House of Representatives approved the CLEAR Act (H.R. 3534), which included a provision to authorize full and dedicated funding of LWCF and authorize the program through 2040. Recently, 95 House members -- led by Representatives Chris Murphy (CT), John Dingell (MI), G.K. Butterfield (NC), and Heath Shuler (NC) -- made a similar bipartisan appeal to legislate full, dedicated LWCF funding in the final days of this Congress.

The legislation now being considered guarantees that LWCF will be available in the future while leaving specific decisions regarding funding levels and project needs to future Congresses. Despite the Senate's full legislative agenda and dwindling number of working days, America's Great Outdoors Act and the LWCF authorization it contains remain in play, and LWCF's many supporters in Capitol Hill and across the country will be working to secure the program's future before the last gavel falls on the 111th Congress.

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The Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition is an informal partnership of national, state and local conservation and recreation organizations working together to support full and dedicated funding for LWCF. For more information, go to: www.lwcfcoalition.org