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NEWS RELEASE

News for Immediate Release

April 16, 2010

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America's Great Outdoors Conference focuses on need for vital land, recreation funding

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Conservation and recreation organizations carried a strong message to the Administration today during the White House's America's Great Outdoors conference – ensure that the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) receives full and permanent funding. That message was well-received by officials who have already shown a commitment to increase funding for the federal government's primary program to protect America's irreplaceable wildlife, natural, historic, recreational resources, and other treasured landscapes.

“LWCF has provided a continuum of conservation and recreation that has touched the vast majority of Americans,” stated The Nature Conservancy President and CEO Mark Tercek. “From local parks and playgrounds where kids can get outside to play, to greenbelts and recreational trails that connect and enhance local communities, to state parks that sustain wildlife and provide hiking, fishing, camping and so much more, to federal public lands that encourage a broad range of outdoor recreation opportunities all the way up to our most pristine national parks, wildlife refuges and wilderness areas – this is the legacy that LWCF has provided. But a commitment this year by Congress to fully and permanently fund LWCF will ensure that future generations will continue to benefit from this tremendous program.”

The America's Great Outdoors Conference focused on the importance of public lands as an economic engine. Federal and state public lands as well as local parks and outdoor recreation sites greatly enhance the quality of life for nearby communities, which attracts new residents, businesses and helps generate tourism-related jobs and revenues for large cities and small towns alike. As cited in the Department of the Interior's 2009 report, annually, “federal parks, refuges and monuments generate more than \$24 billion in recreation and tourism.”

“Active outdoor recreation, including hunting, fishing, camping, climbing, hiking, paddling, backcountry skiing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, and other activities, drives a total of \$730 billion in annual economic activity, supporting 6.5 million jobs (1 of every 20 jobs in the U.S.), and stimulating 8 percent of all consumer spending,” according to Frank Hugelmeyer, president of the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA). “In the West, more than 43 million people participate in hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing each year, spending over \$33 billion annually.”

In addition, the White House Conference delved into the importance of reconnecting American families to the outdoors. Parks, trails, and open space promote healthy lifestyles. Access to natural areas reduces stress, mitigates obesity and other health issues, connects families and communities, and enhances the quality of life for all Americans. Whether through local ball fields or trails, or expansive wilderness areas, connecting people to recreation and outdoors activity promotes good health.

“Close-to-home parks and natural areas are gateways to a lifetime of outdoor recreation and healthy lifestyles,” noted Carol Ash, commissioner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. “A more robust allocation of federal assistance to the states through the Land and Water Conservation Fund is critical if we are to maintain not only these gateways, but also the local economies and jobs they support.”

LWCF is a simple yet effective promise made by Congress nearly a half-century ago to reinvest revenues from the depletion of one natural resource (offshore oil and gas) into the conservation of land and development of recreation areas. Across the country, this grand vision has resulted in the protection of some of America’s most prized national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, National Conservation Lands, and beaches, battlefields, historic areas, and Native American sites. In addition, the program’s state assistance grants help states and local communities to develop park facilities and recreational amenities—creating jobs and supporting the quality-of-life factors that allow communities to attract employers and a strong work force.

Despite its remarkable legacy, funding for LWCF has never approached the grand vision Congress had in 1965. Authorized at \$900 million annually, Congress has only allocated that full amount of money toward land conservation twice in its history, even though revenues from offshore oil and gas development have been well over \$5 billion, and in some years have run as high as \$18 billion, per year.

“This conference clearly shows President Obama’s commitment to protecting our great outdoors and ensuring continued outdoor recreation experiences, but it is essential that full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund is approved by Congress this year,” commented Jim Lighthizer, president of the Civil War Preservation Trust.

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Additional quotes for media use (groups in alphabetical order):

- “Investing in outdoor recreation opportunities is critical for sustaining the health of Americans, preserving our valuable landscapes, and supporting local economies. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is an important tool for our protecting parklands for current and future generations to recreate. The Access Fund and Outdoor Alliance support the President’s proposal to significantly increase funding for outdoor recreation and strategic land investments through the LWCF and finally enable the federal government’s primary, but unfunded, program to protect America’s irreplaceable natural, historic, recreational, and other treasured landscapes.” – Brady Robinson, Executive Director, Access Fund

- “We applaud the Obama administration's full support of LWCF as a significant step in protecting critical landscapes and outdoor recreation opportunities across the country. The Northeast is the most populated region in the nation, making protection of close to home outdoor resources especially important. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is responsible for protecting many important parks and forestlands, but its job is far from done. Our region has many needs: from the millions of acres of unprotected forest land in the Northern Forest, to recreational trails near our major cities. Full funding of the LWCF will help connect the urban populations of the Northeast to the outdoors, providing opportunities for better health and spiritual renewal.” – Walter Graff, Vice President, Appalachian Mountain Club
- “Global warming and human development are having major effects on wildlife and its habitat all over the country. Preserving land in a strategic way, with funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, helps to ensure that habitat will be available for wildlife, including many endangered species, to not only survive, but thrive.” – Mary Beth Beetham, Director of Legislative Affairs, Defenders of Wildlife
- “In addition to providing a therapeutic tonic for the mind, body and spirit our recreational lands are also important to the economy. Local and state LWCF stateside grants require the funding to be matched which creates more than two dollars of benefit for every one dollar invested. America needs jobs and building outdoor recreation facilities in local, state and national parks, refuges, monuments and other public lands puts Americans to work. This investment now will create tourism and outdoor recreation spending for generations to come.” – Joe Elton, President, National Association of State Park Directors
- “The state’s grants portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund has provided needed outdoor recreation improvements in areas and facilities close to nation’s population, from local park and playground projects in rural states like North Dakota, to recovery projects and upgrading of parks in Louisiana, to providing outdoor recreation opportunities and parkland acquisitions in urban areas like Cook County, Ill. The stateside of the program has been successful for over forty years and continues to stimulate active family lifestyles and provide support to the economy of the state and nation.” – Tim Hogsett, President, National Association of State Outdoor Recreation Liaison Officers
- “The true wealth of a country is reflected in the places it has set aside for wilderness and wildlife. We applaud President Obama for calling attention to the responsibility we all have to protect our great natural heritage for our children and grandchildren.” –Mike Daulton, Senior Director of Government Relations, National Audubon Society
- “We are rapidly losing some of America’s greatest natural wonders, and investing in this fund is critical to protecting our public lands for all Americans to enjoy. While we appreciate President Obama’s investment, it falls short of the need and puts our national heritage at risk from incompatible development.” – Ron Tipton, Senior Vice President for Policy, National Parks Conservation Association
- “Investing in wild land conservation is also an investment in people; we depend on these healthy wildlife habitats for clean air and water, economic prosperity, and improved quality of life.” – Evan Hirsche, President, National Wildlife Refuge Association
- “The unique landscapes of the Northern Forest of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York make it a place people want to live, as well as a vacation destination. Our communities enjoy innumerable benefits from proximity to protected forests, parks, trails, refuges, and other areas for hiking, picnicking, hunting, fishing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing,

snowmobiling, paddling, and camping and all the benefits of a well-managed forest that supports local economies. It is thanks to the LWCF that places like the White Mountain National Forest, Umbagog Refuge, Acadia National Park, and a multitude of local and state parks and forests are able to provide the numerous benefits that they do. We are hopeful and excited that through the new initiative of America's Great Outdoors, these diverse opportunities will become even stronger.” – Bruce Clendenning, Policy Director, Northern Forest Alliance

- “This is a critical moment for land conservation in America. Projected population growth will put additional pressure on existing parks and reduce remaining open space, an entire generation's health is at risk from a sedentary lifestyle, and climate change threatens to alter many of our important natural systems. Investing now in the continuum of conservation - from the urban core to wilderness areas - will ensure a healthier and greener future for America and leave an important legacy for our children and grandchildren.” – Will Rogers, President, The Trust for Public Land