

**Testimony of Barbara Tulipane, President and CEO  
National Recreation and Park Association**

**Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment and Related Agencies  
Fiscal Year 2013 Appropriations  
March 22, 2012**

Thank you Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and other honorable members of the subcommittee for this opportunity to comment on the Fiscal Year 2013 Interior Appropriations bill and, specifically, the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is a nonprofit organization working to advance parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts nationwide. Our members touch the lives of every American in every community every day. Through our network of approximately 20,000 citizen and professional members we represent park and recreation departments in cities, counties, townships, special park districts, and regional park authorities, along with citizens concerned with ensuring close-to-home access to parks and recreation opportunities exist in their communities.

In Fiscal Year 2012, you provided \$322.9 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), with \$45 million of that amount allocated to the State Assistance Program. You also specified that zero State Assistance dollars were to be used for the Department of Interior's (DOI) proposed competitive grant program. We thank you for investing in conservation through the LWCF, and especially thank you for investing in states and local communities through the State Assistance Program and for protecting the integrity of that program.

As this committee works to craft the Fiscal Year 2013 Interior Appropriations bill, NRPA makes three requests. First, we ask that you provide ample funding for the LWCF; second we ask that you choose to invest in local communities by allocating 40 percent of total LWCF appropriations to the State Assistance Program; and third we ask that you, once again, deny the DOI the ability to deprive states and local communities of funding by specifying that zero State Assistance dollars are to be used for the DOI's proposed competitive grant program.

We recognize that you face difficult decisions relative to Fiscal Year 2013. However, the LWCF is budget neutral, having been authorized with a dedicated funding source of oil and gas leasing revenues. Over \$6 billion a year is provided through these leases, and the funding provided to the LWCF is a minuscule fraction of this amount. Zeroing out the LWCF would negatively impact our country, especially at the state and local levels. There is a common misconception that LWCF is merely a federal land acquisition program. Nothing could be further from the truth, as the LWCF State Assistance Program provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants to states and local communities for the construction of outdoor recreation projects. The land purchased with LWCF State Assistance funding remains the property of the state or local government, and the facilities developed through the LWCF remain publicly accessible in perpetuity.

The LWCF State Assistance Program ensures that local communities, such as Blackfoot, Idaho, have places where adults and children can go to recreate and enjoy the outdoors. It is a means by which this committee can provide investment to local communities, and for Fiscal Year 2013, we are asking this committee to make the investment by allocating a minimum of 40 percent of total LWCF appropriations to the State Assistance Program. Current law requires that a minimum of 40 percent of LWCF appropriations be provided to the federal land acquisition program, and we are merely asking for you to invest in local communities by allocating the same percentage amount to the State Assistance Program. Evidence of the impact of such an allocation is clear when you consider that in Fiscal Year 2012 California received approximately \$3.6 million through the State Assistance Program. Had 40 percent of LWCF appropriations been allocated to the State Assistance Program, the state would have received more than \$11 million. Minnesota received \$738,000 in Fiscal Year 2012, but would have received more than \$2.2 million with a 40 percent allocation.

There are many viable reasons for such an allocation. One seemingly simple reason is access. Not everyone in America has access to our amazing National Park System, but everyone does have access to local outdoor spaces and recreational facilities provided through their state and local community. Additionally, accessibility to physical activity through outdoor recreation is crucial to reaping the benefits of healthy lifestyles and reducing health care epidemics such as childhood obesity.

Close-to-home public parks and recreation are available to every age, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class in every community, both urban and rural, of every state. Is there any other program that so effectively treats all individuals so equally? This is made possible because LWCF funding has always been allocated by formula through the State Assistance Program, whereby a portion of funds are equally allocated among all states and territories and the remainder is allocated based on population. This ensures that 100 percent of the State Assistance funding is equitably distributed throughout the nation. This formula currently does not favor one congressional district or party affiliation over the other, or projects that can gain the most national visibility. That would radically change under the DOI's proposal whereby more than one-third of the State Assistance's funding would be used for a DOI-administered competitive grants program. The DOI proposal would effectively decrease the amount of funding provided to each state as only a small number of projects would likely be funded. For example, Ohio would have lost approximately \$950,000 in FY 2012 LWCF funding under the DOI proposal. Additionally, more rural states, such as Wyoming, would have to expect a loss of funding as only urban projects of national significance could compete for the grants. The distribution formula used for the past 47 years has yielded equitable results as 98 percent of America's counties have received State Assistance funds. In Fiscal Year 2012, this committee ensured equal allocation among the states by specifically directing that zero dollars were to be spent on a competitive grant program in the Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations bill. NRPA supports repeating that language in Fiscal Year 2013 and rejecting any ongoing or future efforts by DOI to do otherwise. Absent directive language, the DOI has authority to implement its program.

#### **LWCF State Assistance: Addressing National Issues on the Local Level**

Few programs can address so many national priorities as effectively as the LWCF State Assistance Program does, with so few dollars and without negatively impacting the federal budget.

The National Park Service documented in a March 2011 report that the \$40 million appropriated to LWCF State Assistance in 2010 made a direct impact on park and recreation facilities in or near 221 local communities, helped communities make 5,905 new acres available for outdoor recreation use and enjoyment, and helped “encourage active participation to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States pursuant to the original intent of the Act.” While the LWCF State Assistance program annual benefits hundreds of local communities, local communities are in need of more recreational resources. As documented by the National Park Service, our country faces more than \$18 billion in unmet need for outdoor recreational resources.

### **LWCF State Assistance Stimulates Jobs and Local Economies**

According to a study by Southwick in October 2011, the economic impacts of outdoor recreation, natural resource conservation, and historic preservation activities in the United States contributed a minimum of \$1.06 trillion to the economy, created a \$107 billion return on investment to federal, state and local governments through tax revenue, and supported 9.4 million jobs. The National Association of State Park Directors reports that America’s state park system contributes \$20 billion to local and state economies. Impressively, this section of the economy continues to grow even during the ongoing economic recession, and thus has enormous potential to immediately create new jobs. For example, the Outdoor Industry Association reported in October 2011 that the outdoor recreation industry grew at a rate of 4.1percent in 2010 and 5.9 percent in 2011. As more people are using the outdoors, more jobs are being created, and nowhere is outdoor recreation more prevalent than state and local outdoor recreation areas.

Virtually every community in New York has acquired and/or developed outdoor recreational facilities with the help of the LWCF State Assistance Program. As a result, the New York active outdoor recreation economy supports 130,000 jobs across New York, generates nearly \$800 million in annual state tax revenue, and produces \$11.3 billion annually in retail sales and services.

Arizonans also recreate close-to-home in local parks and venues. Parks like the De Anza Trail help the Arizona active outdoor recreation economy support 82,000 jobs across Arizona, generate nearly \$350 million in annual state tax revenue, and produce almost \$5 billion annually in retail sales and services.

Without the continued support of this committee for the nation’s treasured state and local parks and recreation sites, Congress would effectively contribute to state and local unemployment rates and deeper budget deficits.

### **Public Health**

The LWCF State Assistance Program plays a critical role in advancing parks and recreation that directly contributes to fighting our nation’s obesity and “Type 2” diabetes epidemics. Several medical studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between proximity to

recreational facilities and parks and increased participation in physical activity. It is estimated that obesity costs the United States government about \$344 billion in medical-related expenses by 2018, accounting for approximately 21 percent of health care spending. The CDC currently estimates 65 percent of adults and 16 percent of children are overweight or obese, and even small improvements in the lifestyles of Americans would yield marked health improvements and contribute substantially to decreasing the nation's rising health care costs. In fact, CDC notes that the creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25.6 percent increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days per week. Investing in programs such as the LWCF State Assistance Program would provide a significant return on investment through the **reduction** in health care costs by ensuring access to places for physical activity.

### **Environmental Benefits**

The LWCF State Assistance Program not only meets important national goals and delivers tangible health and economic benefits to everyone; it also significantly contributes to protecting the environment and promoting environmental stewardship. LWCF State Assistance projects have a historical record of contributing to reduced and delayed stormwater runoff volumes, enhanced groundwater recharge, stormwater pollutant reductions, reduced sewer overflow events, increased carbon sequestration, urban heat island mitigation and reduced energy demands, resulting in improved air quality, increased wildlife habitat, and increased land values on the local level.

For example, the LWCF State Assistance Program has been a vital part of the history of Geauga Park District (GPD) in Geauga County, Ohio. LWCF State Assistance funding was used in the acquisition and development of Big Creek Park, Beartown Lakes Reservation, Burton Wetlands (a designated state nature preserve) and Swine Creek Park. Each park plays a unique role in meeting the mission of GPD, from protecting the watershed and unique geological formations to providing recreation opportunities to a diverse range of user groups.

More recently, an LWCF State Assistance grant was awarded for the preservation of 20 acres of wetlands outside of the Village of Middlefield, Ohio; home to the fourth largest Amish settlement in the world. The LWCF State Assistance Program made it possible to preserve these areas for future generations

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, local parks and recreation agencies are not merely community amenities; they are essential services necessary for the economic and environmental vitality, as well as physical wellness, of communities throughout this country. LWCF's State Assistance Program has proven itself invaluable to improving state and local economies, while simultaneously reducing long-term health care costs through increased access to physical activity. This subcommittee and Congress have the rare opportunity to achieve national goals without increasing spending or adding to the deficit, and can do so by adopting three simple recommendations: do not zero out the LWCF; allocate a minimum of 40 percent of LWCF funding to the State Assistance Program; and prohibit any diversion of formula funds to a DOI competitive grant program.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share NRPA's recommendations and your consideration of my remarks.