

Testimony of Kathy DeCoster
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Regarding the Land and Water Conservation Fund
and other Federal Land Conservation Programs
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
March 22, 2012

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on programs under your jurisdiction for the Fiscal Year 2013 appropriations process. I represent The Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national nonprofit land conservation organization working to protect land for people in communities across the nation. We are extremely grateful for the support members of this Subcommittee and other conservation leaders in Congress have shown for federal conservation programs during these challenging fiscal times. We recognize that the Subcommittee will again face enormous challenges in meeting the broad range of priority needs in the Interior and Environment bill this year. But we believe the American people support continued investments in conservation, even during a time of economic challenge. Most recently, on “Super Tuesday”, voters in communities in Florida, Georgia and Ohio approved conservation funding measures, putting 2012’s passage rate at 100% - four for four so far.

These ballot initiatives reflect the very essence of conservation in the 21st century: collaborative, leveraged, partnership-based and locally supported. Federal funding is an absolutely critical part of the conservation toolbox and provides manifold benefits to the American people. Given the limited public conservation funding at all levels of government, TPL works to leverage federal conservation dollars, bringing to bear private philanthropic support as well as state and local funding to forge workable solutions to complex conservation funding challenges.

We are especially grateful for your recognition during the Fiscal Year 2012 process that funding for programs like the **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)** is a worthwhile investment. TPL respectfully requests that you continue this commitment by supporting the President’s budget request for FY 2013 for LWCF of \$450 million. This amount includes \$270 million for federal land purchases, \$60 million for grants to states for parks and outdoor recreation, including a new competitive grant component for city parks, \$60 million for the **Forest Legacy Program** and \$60 million for the **Cooperative Endangered Species program**. Continued investment in this suite of LWCF programs is essential and TPL is ready to work with the Subcommittee to ensure that dollars invested are well spent on our most urgent needs. We urge you to also support the President’s budget requests for the **North American Wetlands Conservation Act** and the **Community Forest Program**.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

For almost 50 years the Land and Water Conservation Fund has been the cornerstone that sustains our federal public lands heritage and remains today a compelling and urgently needed program. When Congress created LWCF in 1964, it sought to ensure that land conservation would receive funds every year by dedicating certain revenues. For most of its history, the major source of LWCF funds has been revenues from offshore oil and gas development in federal waters. LWCF activities neither require nor are designed to receive taxpayer dollars. This arrangement is built on the principle that the revenues generated from energy development and natural resource depletion should be used for the protection of other natural resources such as

parks, open space, and wildlife habitat for the benefit of current and future generations of Americans. TPL believes that this principle remains a sound one and that the American public supports using this very small percentage of OCS receipts – which annually average over \$6 billion – as a conservation offset.

Federal Land Acquisitions - Every year tens of millions of Americans, as well as international visitors to our country, visit our public lands. Federal funding of land acquisition ensures that the public can access lands for these recreational and educational purposes. If accessible properties are instead sold for development or subdivision, there is no guarantee that the public will be able to enjoy the nearby public lands. Purchase can also enhance the quality of recreational experiences, encouraging greater public participation and use, and in some cases resolve public land management issues and achieve cost savings. There is a clear economic impact from these activities. A 2006 federal interagency study determined that 87.5 million people annually spend \$122.3 billion on fishing, hunting and wildlife watching alone. These activities and others have significant ripple effects. The Outdoor Industry Foundation estimates that active outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy, supports nearly 6.5 million jobs across the U.S., generates \$49 billion in annual national tax revenue, and produces \$289 billion annually in retail sales and services across the country.

Among the recreation destinations whose economic and natural resource values might be significantly compromised without sufficient LWCF funding in FY 2013 are Virgin Islands National Park where TPL is working to finally connect the two sections of the national park along the shores of Maho Bay, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in Idaho, where a conservation easement will protect the lands along the river are scenic vista at the gateway to the NRA, the California Coastal National Monument, where a property will connect visitors to two miles of the Pacific coast, and along the Pacific Crest Trail in Washington state.

Incompatible development within established federal units is a continuing concern for the public and for public land managers, and we have found that private landowners of inholdings and edgeholdings are open to and quite often seek a conservation solution. Faced with uncertainty about the availability of federal land acquisition dollars, however, many landowners find that they cannot afford to wait on a win-win outcome. Adequate and timely acquisition of inholdings through the LWCF is critical to efforts to protect the nation's public lands heritage when these time-sensitive acquisition opportunities arise. Often the window for a conservation outcome is narrow, and the availability of LWCF funds ensures that landowners can sell their properties in a timely manner. For instance, important conservation properties are available for a limited time at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park in Georgia, at the new Middle Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico and at Red Cliffs National Conservation Area in Utah. Funding for Kennesaw Mountain – a national battlefield that is under severe development threat - is particularly important given the ongoing commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War. In addition, a number of partially-completed projects at Virgin Islands NP, Sawtooth NRA, and the Carson, Uncompaghre and Superior National Forests await further funding to be completed and are included in the FY 2013 President's budget request. Recent funding levels for LWCF have been insufficient to allow agencies to complete these projects in a timely fashion and we urge your support for funding levels in FY 2013 that address these needs.

We also urge the Subcommittee to consider fully the urgent need for funding for Civil War Sesquicentennial units, national trails and recreational/hunting/fishing access projects as proposed in the FY 2013 President's budget for the National Park Service, Bureau of Land

Management and US Forest Service. TPL has pending projects eligible under each of these categories and stand ready to provide information to the Subcommittee to support these categorical line item requests.

As the Subcommittee evaluates the myriad programmatic needs and measures for making programs more efficient for the FY 2013 Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill, we look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure that funds are spent wisely on strategic and urgent conservation priorities.

National Park Service LWCF grants - Since 1965, the stateside program has provided 41,000 grants to states and local communities for park protection and development of recreation facilities. This program reaches deep into communities across our nation, supporting citizen-led efforts to conserve places of local importance. Stateside funds were an essential part of land protection in Maine's famed 100-Mile Wilderness, the northernmost and wildest stretch of the Appalachian Trail. Most recently, TPL worked with the state of Tennessee to add 1,388 acres to the popular Cumberland Trail, extending it by 19 miles, using state LWCF grant funding. To meet needs such as these as they continue to arise in all 50 states and in U.S. territories, we urge you to fund this program at \$60 million.

Competitive grants - Within the \$60 million requested for state LWCF grants in the President's Budget for FY 2012, the administration has proposed a new competitive grant program to invest in community parks and greenways, landscapes, and recreational riverways. This effort – which is based on an idea championed by Ranking Member Moran during the FY 2011 appropriations process – will particularly help cities and urbanized counties increase the availability of parks and green spaces for residents of our more populated areas, many of whom lack access to safe, close-to-home recreational sites. This proposed targeting of LWCF funds to areas most in need of new parks will help address the health threats many Americans – especially children – are now facing due to lack of access to parks. TPL is the nation's only national land conservation organization working to create parks in cities across the nation, and we strongly support this competitive grant program as laid out in the Department of the Interior's FY 2013 budget proposal. With our extensive experience creating parks for people nationwide, we see this type of program as meeting a critical need in the places where most people live and recreate. There is currently no federal program that addresses park needs for cities, metropolitan areas and urbanized counties. The NPS LWCF grants program – funded competitively rather than by formula - could assist TPL's work in places like the Cleveland area, where we are working to connect more people to the Cuyahoga River, in the Twin Cities, where we are embarking on fundraising for a new park in a neighborhood where access is limited and more than half the residents have incomes of less than \$35,000 a year, and in New York City, where we are working along the Bronx and Harlem River to ensure more safe and accessible green space for a community now cut off from these rivers.

U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program

The **Forest Legacy Program** provides extraordinary assistance to states and localities seeking to preserve important working forests. Since its inception in 1990, the Forest Legacy Program has protected over 2 million acres of forestland together with over \$630 million in non-federal matching funds. For FY 2013, the President's Budget recommends projects that provide multiple public benefits that derive from forests – clean water, wildlife protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, public access to recreation, economic development and sustainable forestry. The Forest Legacy Program has been very effective over its short history, leveraging a

dollar for dollar match to federal funds, well more than is required under the program. TPL urges your continued support for sustained investment in this strategic conservation program. Included in the FY 2013 budget are three projects where TPL is working in partnership with the states of Idaho, Vermont and Wisconsin to protect recreation access for snowmobilers and hikers, ensure jobs in the woods, buffer important federal and state conservation areas and provide strategic land conservation that fits a larger goal.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Land Conservation Grant Programs

We are grateful for the Subcommittee's historic support for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant programs, including the **Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund** – which leverages state and private funds and has protected threatened and endangered species habitat across the nation. Through the most recent grant cycle, for example, TPL, in partnership with the State of Washington, secured a \$3.5 million grant that helped protect 2,700 acres of pristine habitat along the Methow River in Okanogan County. This habitat is considered critical spawning habitat for the endangered Pacific salmon, but benefits many other protected species as well, like Canada lynx, gray wolves, and bull trout. The Methow Watershed project leveraged \$4.27 million in non-federal funding, which is more than double the non-federal match required under the program. We also urge your support for program funding at the President's Budget level of \$60 million in FY 2013. The **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)** provides much-needed matching grants to carry out wetlands conservation, restoration and enhancement projects. We urge the Subcommittee to provide the President's Budget request of \$39.4 million.

U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Program

Last but not least, we urge your continued support for the **Community Forest Program (CFP)** which received appropriations in FYs 10, 11 and 12 and now has its first-ever grant solicitation underway. This program will provide a complement to existing conservation programs by helping local communities and tribes identify, purchase, and manage important forestlands that are threatened with development. These locally led efforts can be tailored to the needs of each community, from timber revenue for local budgets to recreation access and outdoor education. Every federal dollar from CFP will be evenly matched by funding from state, local, and private sources. We believe the response to the first grant round will be substantial and that this program will generate significant interest from local entities concerned about the future of their close-to-home forests. TPL is working right now to create new community forests in California, Montana and Vermont, and we hope that the Community Forest Program funds will contribute to these efforts. Given the strong interest in community forests from coast to coast, we urge you to include the President's Budget level for CFP of \$4 million in the FY 2013 bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in Public Witness Day. The programs highlighted in my testimony are critical to the future of conservation at the local, state and federal levels, reflect the continued demand on the part of the American people for access to outdoor recreation, help sustain our economy and reflect the true partnership that exists in federal conservation efforts. As ever, we are deeply thankful for the Subcommittee's recognition of the importance of these programs and urge you to maintain robust funding for them in the FY 2013 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies bill. Thank you for help and support, and for your consideration of our requests.