

Now is the time for all Oregonians to come to the aid of our air, lands, and waterways



OP-ed by Rep. Paul Evans

Oregonians maintain a special relationship with our environment: it transcends ideology, party, and socio-economic station. We know stewardship means a shared responsibility. We understand that sustainability of our place and people depends on us – all of us. This is why I joined legislators and elected officials from across the country and signed a letter asking for reauthorization of the Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) within the US Department of Interior.

The LWCF was established in 1964. Since then it has served as a bipartisan commitment, safeguarding our natural areas, water resources, and cultural heritage. It provides a critical tool for our conservation programming. Tragically, it will suffer drastic cuts if the US Congress adopts Secretary Zinke's budget recommendations.

Zinke recommended a 95 percent reduction in the LWCF despite its impact: \$3.9 billion in grants funding conservation projects in nearly every community throughout our nation. These proposed cuts would prove disastrous, causing thousands of staff lay-offs — including at least 2,000 park rangers. There would be reductions in matching funds for preservation of natural and wild spaces, as well as elimination of access for millions of Americans to our public spaces.

We must secure full funding for the LWCF. It remains one of, if not the, most successful conservation programs in history. It draws upon offshore gas and oil royalties, not taxpayers, to expand, develop, and improve public lands for recreational areas, conservation, and the preservation of our natural ecosystems. It exemplifies the conservationist vision of President Theodore Roosevelt: reinvestment of benefits derived from use of federal lands for conservation must benefit all.



For those who question the value of environmental programming as a federal priority, I offer the following Bureau of Economic Analysis: outdoor recreation contributes \$887,000,000,000 (that's billion) to our national economy, and supports 7,600,000 jobs across our nation, state, and communities. The analysis concluded that every \$1.00 of LWCF investment yields a return of at least \$4.00 in value.

In the Mid-Willamette Valley, the LWCF helped fund the Keizer Rapids Community Park Acquisition, the Stettheimer Park Skate Park, and the Champoege Park Visitor Center projects, as well as hundreds of other projects throughout the State of Oregon. Since 2000, Oregon has received over \$10,000,000 in grants from the LWCF enabling millions more in leveraged programming. Simply put, these projects would not have been possible absent LWCF support.

Protection of our air, lands, and waterways is a shared responsibility. As a home-grown Oregonian, as a state legislator, and as a veteran I believe it is our duty to stand up for future generations. Over the past few years we have taken steps to increase access and affordability to our natural spaces, but we cannot continue progress absent the LWCF.

Now is the time for all Oregonians to come to the aid of our air, lands, and waterways. Together we can fight back; together we can prevent the Trump Administration, Secretary Zinke, and the US Congress from abrogating our duties to our place and people.