

A photograph of two people kayaking on a river. The person in the foreground is wearing a red life vest and a white cap, paddling a red kayak. The person in the background is wearing a blue life vest and a white shirt, paddling a blue kayak. The water is calm and reflects the surrounding greenery.

Our Land, Our Water, Our Heritage

AMERICA DEPENDS ON THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Economic Benefits of the Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) supports and maintains the economic asset that our federal, state and local public lands represent. Federal investment in public lands (parks, refuges, trails, rivers, recreation areas and national forests) leverages state, local and private funds, and drives a recreation industry that supports millions of U.S. jobs.

Hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, paddling and other outdoor recreation activities contribute a total of \$730 billion annually to the economy, supporting 6.5 million jobs (1 of every 20 jobs in the U.S.) and stimulating 8% of all consumer spending, according to the Outdoor Industry Foundation. This sector generates \$289 billion annually in retail sales and services across the U.S., as well as \$88 billion in annual state and national tax revenue.

Whether manufacturing, retail or service related, most of these jobs are sustainable resource or tourism-based jobs and cannot be exported. Looking forward, outdoor recreation has the potential to create an additional 100,000 to 200,000 U.S. jobs, again with **magnified impacts in local and rural communities.** Federal lands are key to local recreation and tourism industries, and visitors to these areas spend money on food, lodging and equipment; for active outdoor recreation trips, \$243 billion in retail sales created a \$379 billion ripple effect for a total economic contribution of \$622 billion.

This ripple effect persists beyond services: for active outdoor recreation gear, \$46 billion in retail sales created a \$62 billion ripple effect for a total economic contribution of \$108 billion. **The outdoor industry is one of the most healthy sectors of our economy, even in these difficult times.** For example, in July 2011 **outdoor specialty sales rose 7%, outdoor chain sales climbed 12% and outdoor online specialty sales jumped 14%, compared with the average 4% year-over-year increase in consumer spending** reported by the National Retail Federation for the same month. July sales at specialty, chain and Internet outdoor retailers totaled almost \$450 million.

In its September 5, 2011 “Open Letter to Congress and the President of the United States,” the U.S. Chamber of Commerce describes specific steps that can be taken right now spur faster job growth in America’s private sector. In the top five: travel and tourism, which is “a small business-centered sector that already accounts for \$700 billion in revenues and 7.4 million American jobs.” The Chamber notes that spending by foreign tourists counts as U.S. exports and helps our balance of trade, and that **we can create 1.3 million American jobs by 2020 just by restoring the U.S. share of the travel market to its 2000 level.**

The Chamber of Commerce letter states that “The United States is the greatest destination in the world,”

but it neglects to point out that our National Parks and public lands are one of the greatest draws of both foreign and domestic tourists in the U.S. In 2010, 437 million recreational visits to Department of the Interior (DOI) managed lands contributed over \$44 billion in economic activity and supported more than 388,000 jobs – many in rural areas. Use of water, timber and other resources produced from Federal lands supported about 370,000 jobs and \$48 billion in economic activity in 2010. **The \$214 million that DOI spent on land acquisition in 2010 created an estimated \$442 million in economic activity—more than doubling the return on investment-- and about 3,000 jobs.**

Land acquisition programs funded by LWCF do not simply add to the federal estate: they include **conservation easements that protect working landscapes** by allowing ranchers and farmers to stay on their land and continue acting as responsible stewards of open space. LWCF also funds the Forest Legacy Program, which works with timber owners to sustain working forests that provide jobs, forest products and opportunities for recreation, as well as protecting water supplies and important wildlife habitat. **The LWCF state grants program further supports America's state park system, which contributes \$20 billion to local and state economies.**

LWCF also helps landowners and local banks recover from economic challenges. For many farmers, ranchers and timberland owners, land is their biggest source of equity. In these tough economic times, many landowners are facing the loss of their properties through foreclosure. Working with federal and state land management agencies, the LWCF program provides landowners with another option to preserve their equity and keep iconic working landscapes intact. LWCF can also provide banks with an important option to move foreclosed properties off their balance sheets, strengthening the economic health of local communities.

Even while providing all these public benefits, **LWCF is not funded by taxpayer dollars.** To keep pace with rampant development pressures and growth that threaten the few remaining open spaces we have left in this country, the LWCF Act of 1965 made a commitment to the American public that a small portion of revenues from offshore drilling paid by oil companies would go to conservation and outdoor recreation programs. **This continued investment is crucial to maintaining public access and close-to-home recreation for all Americans as our population and urban base inexorably grows.**