

GUARANTEEING SUBSTANTIAL FUNDING FOR THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Passed: 73-25

SUMMARY:

The Senate approved legislation guaranteeing \$900 million per year for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and \$9.5 billion over five years to address the public lands maintenance backlog. (*June 17, 2020, Roll Call No. 121*)

BACKGROUND:

Americans of all ages depend upon our national wildlife refuges, parks, forests, Bureau of Land Management lands and local and state parks for cultural activities, recreation, and ecosystem services. Adequate funding for conservation projects on those lands is essential for the public to be able to enjoy these special places.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is one of the most successful conservation programs in the United States. Over its more than 50 years in existence, LWCF has contributed more than \$19 billion towards conservation and outdoor recreation projects in every state and several territories. Projects funded by LWCF include protecting public lands inholdings from development, creating new green spaces in park-poor areas, and supporting endangered species restoration. Despite the fund's broad support, Congress has consistently raided LWCF funds for unrelated projects and fully funded the program only once.

Federal land management agencies have also suffered from severe underfunding of operations and maintenance. Public lands include 640 million acres of parks, forests, and rivers which welcome hundreds of millions of visitors per year. But high levels of visitation come with the need for constant improvements and repairs. Due to years of underfunding, federal land management agencies have accumulated maintenance projects totaling \$19 billion as of FY2018, including \$12 billion in deferred maintenance for the National Park Service (NPS) alone.

In the House, Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) introduced the Great American Outdoors Act, H.R. 1957, a bill that fully funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million per year. The bill also provided \$9.5 billion over five years to address the public lands maintenance backlog. Together, these provisions ensure protection for and access to public lands for generations to come. On April 9, 2020, the House passed H.R. 1957 with a voice vote and sent the measure to the Senate for approval.

OUTCOME:

On June 17, 2020, the Senate passed H.R. 1957, as amended, 73-25. "Yes" was the pro-conservation vote. Subsequently, the House agreed to the Senate amendments and passed H.R. 1957, and the President signed the bill into law on August 4, 2020.