

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

We are writing to express our strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Forest Legacy Program. As you begin the process of drafting the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you include a strong investment in LWCF and Forest Legacy that will support public land conservation and ensure access to the outdoors for all Americans.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of LWCF and the 25th anniversary of the Forest Legacy Program this year, we are reminded of the important role these programs play in protecting natural resource lands, outdoor recreation opportunities, and working forests at the local, state and federal levels, ensuring that critical wildlife habitat, hunting and fishing access, state and local parks, Civil War battlefields, and other important lands for current and future generations. We firmly believe that LWCF and Forest Legacy are important programs to ensure continued access to public lands for hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities – an important and unique aspect of our American heritage. Continued investments in these programs help our nation's outdoor recreation, conservation and preservation economy, which supports millions of American jobs and contributes billions of dollars annually to the entire U.S. economy.

Since 1977, LWCF receipts have been collected annually to specifically fund federal land acquisition, conserve threatened and endangered species, and provide grants to states. LWCF was designed to not use taxpayer dollars and the LWCF receipts are not revenues for general purposes, but rather payments to the government specifically intended for conservation spending. However, more than \$18 billion has been siphoned from the LWCF trust fund since the program's inception in 1965, diverted from their original conservation purpose. This chronic redirection of funding has created a large backlog of conservation needs across the country, including already-negotiated land acquisitions from willing sellers. The resulting uncertainty has led states and federal land management agencies to postpone or cancel many important projects.

Despite a history of underfunding, LWCF remains the premier federal program to conserve our nation's land, water, historic and recreational heritage. The LWCF and Forest Legacy provide a diverse array of conservation tools to address national, state, local and regionally driven priorities across the country. These include working lands easements that allow farmers and ranchers to continue acting as stewards of the landscape that sustains their livelihoods and working forest

projects conserved through Forest Legacy keeping critical timberlands forested and accessible and providing jobs in rural communities.

The LWCF is also a critical tool to acquire inholdings, expand public lands and protect national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, wild and scenic river corridors, national scenic and historic trails, Bureau of Land Management lands and other federal areas. The companion LWCF state grants program provides crucial support for state and local park acquisitions, recreational facilities, and trail corridors. The LWCF stateside program has funded over 41,000 projects including outdoor recreation facilities, sports fields, and trails in all fifty states. The LWCF state grant is the government's primary investment tool for ensuring that children and families have access to close-to-home recreation and the demand is far outstripping the available funding. Access to local parks and community green spaces is vital for connecting youth and their families across the country with the outdoors.

These LWCF and Forest Legacy expenditures also create important long-term savings for our federal agencies and the public because they secure land that provides valuable water resources, guard against incompatible development, support private working lands, and reduce fire risk. We hope you will remember that both LWCF and Forest Legacy leverage and complement state, local, and private conservation investments.

We look forward to working with the Subcommittee in the coming months to ensure that these vital programs are adequately funded in FY 2016 to support our longstanding commitment to conservation and to ensure that critical park protection and recreational development opportunities across the nation exist for generations to come. As you begin drafting the FY 2016 Interior Appropriations bill, please include strong and consistent funding for both LWCF and Forest Legacy.

We are grateful for your leadership in ensuring that funds necessary for our conservation and recreation needs across the country will continue to be available, particularly this year as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of LWCF and the 25th anniversary of the Forest Legacy Program.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



RICHARD BURR
United States Senator

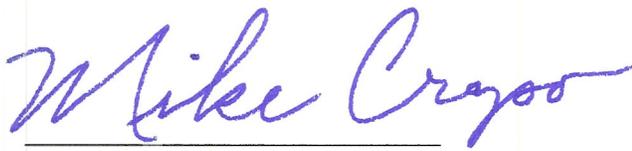


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United States Senator

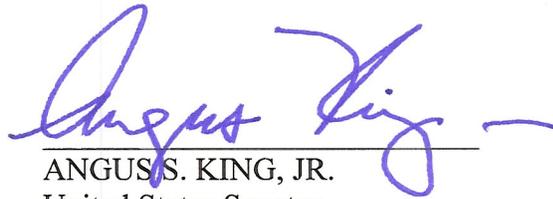


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cc: Chairman Thad Cochran
Vice Chairwoman Barbara A. Mikulski



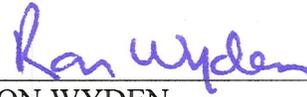
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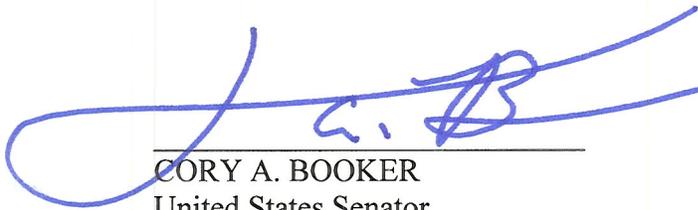
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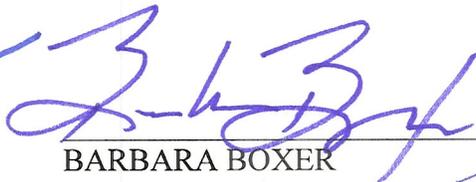
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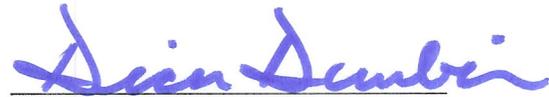
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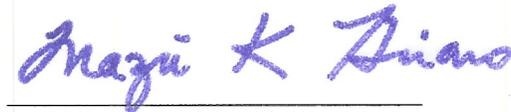
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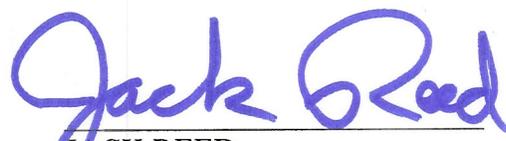
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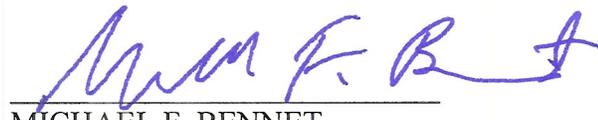
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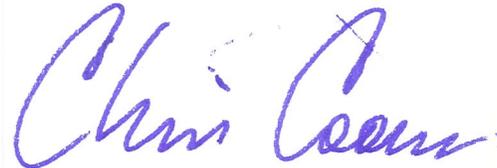
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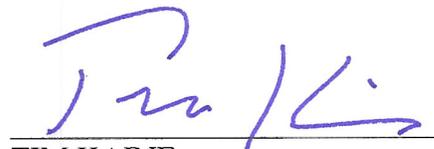
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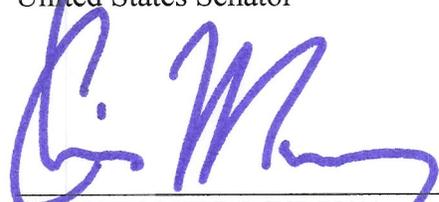
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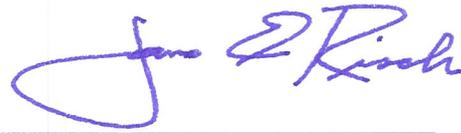
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