**LWCF: Land & Water Conservation Fund Grants**

**One Sentence Description:**

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants are awarded to municipal and county governments for the acquisition and restoration of ecological and recreational lands.

**Short Description:**

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a nationwide program that distributes grants to state, county, and municipal agencies to acquire and rehabilitate lands for recreational purposes. The program began to distribute funds in 1966, and its primary focus has been on urban recreation in the eastern states. By its fiftieth year of operation in 2014, the LWCF had distributed more than 42,000 grants to support more than 29,000 recreation projects, totaling more than four million dollars and covering three million acres. A significant portion went to western governments to acquire and improve non-federal park lands. This website maps grants awarded since 1970.

**Full Description:**

Unlike the other natural resource revenue sharing programs mapped by *Follow the Money*, the Land and Water Conservation Fund operates as a granting program, and distribution involves a many moving parts and significant political input. LWCF grants require counties and municipalities to apply for funding by enumerating specific projects and budgets. Federal approval is done in consultation with congressional legislators from the state, and the state must provide matching funds to qualify for consideration.

Another distinguishing feature is the program’s recreational roots. The legislative history of the LWCF stretched over three administrations. Discussions began in 1956 with an investigation commissioned by President Dwight Eisenhower, and in 1958 with the congressionally mandated Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. The ORRRC report, submitted to President John Kennedy in 1962, called for the creation of a permanent fund that would enable federal, state, and local governments to acquire and rehabilitate lands for recreational purposes. Final passage came in 1964 when Lyndon Johnson signed the somewhat confusingly titled “Land and Water Conservation Fund of 1965” (PL 88-578) on the same day as the Wilderness Act (PL 88-577). The LWCF was in effect an urban counterpart to protecting rural wildlands.

The LWCF created a permanent trust fund supplied by fees and gas taxes, but it mandated that most grants must be for land acquisition and recreational projects in the eastern United States. Acquisition and restoration projects in the public lands states were always a lower priority, but western projects were in all other respects similar. They have focused on urban and suburban landscapes and on ecological rehabilitation and recreational development. The LWCF’s funding mechanism was main political concern in its earliest years. Congress worried that reliance on user fees and gas taxes would create inflationary pressures on these items, so in 1968, Congress switched to a funding model that would appropriate a portion of the annual royalties from offshore oil drilling. This was a popular substitute that remains the source of revenues to this day, but congressional appropriations have not always matched the demands of the program.

Over time several agencies have administered the LWCF. In the early years the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation—another product of the 1962 ORRRC report—oversaw the granting program. In 1978 authority shifted briefly to the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service within the Bureau of Land Management, but in 1981 the National Park Service took over the program and has stewarded ever since. Congress is still the fiscal gatekeeper, however. As with the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program, the LCWF depends on an annual appropriation, and just like the broader history of fiscal politics at local, state, and national levels, legislative willingness to sustain these environmental grants has waxed and waned since the early 1980s. The program technically expired at the end September 2015 when Congress refused to reauthorize the LWCF.

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