

**Statement for the Record of**

**the American Society of Civil Engineers**

**on**

**United States Senate**

**Committee on Energy & Natural Resources**

**Markup of Land and Water Conservation Fund**  
**Reauthorization Legislation**

**October 2, 2018**

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)<sup>1</sup> appreciates the opportunity to submit our views on the critical importance of reauthorizing and fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). We also want to thank the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for holding a markup on this urgent and timely matter.

Well-maintained public parks and public lands are critical drivers of our nation's economy, as well as a source of water for the 180 million people in over 68,000 communities who receive their drinking water from national forests and grasslands that capture and filter it. Despite the growing popularity of public parks and lands, chronic underfunding of our parks infrastructure, including a lack of full funding for the LWCF, continues to plague the system, threatening both the safety of these infrastructure systems and the ability to meet the demand of a growing population.

Infrastructure is the foundation that connects the nation's businesses, communities, and people, serves as the backbone to the U.S. economy, and is vital to the nation's public health and welfare. Every four years, ASCE publishes the *Infrastructure Report Card*, which grades the nation's 16 major infrastructure categories using a simple A to F school report card format. The Report Card examines the current infrastructure needs and conditions, assigning grades and making recommendations to raise them.

Last year, ASCE released its *2017 Infrastructure Report Card*<sup>2</sup>, giving the nation's overall infrastructure a grade of "D+;" public parks also received a grade of "D+." From supporting industries such as lodging and restaurants, to providing clean water to homes, to giving citizens the opportunity to partake in recreational activities, the lands, historical parks, cultural sites, monuments, battlefields, and recreational areas under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – as well as those public parks operated at the state and local level – play important roles in American life. Significant and strategic investments from all tiers of government and the private sector are long overdue to close the growing funding gap.

The National Park Service's (NPS) 2016 centennial anniversary generated a new wave of excitement for our nation's public parks. A record-breaking 331 million people spent an estimated \$18.4 billion in local gateway regions while visiting National Parks in 2016, a 7 percent increase in the number of visitors compared to 2015. The 2016 visitor spending supported a total of 318,000 thousand jobs and generated \$34.9 billion for the U.S. economy<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the Outdoor Industry Association's 2017 National Recreation

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<sup>1</sup> ASCE was founded in 1852 and is the country's oldest national civil engineering organization. It represents more than 150,000 civil engineers individually in private practice, government, industry, and academia who are dedicated to the advancement of the science and profession of civil engineering. ASCE is a non-profit educational and professional society organized under Part 1.501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. [www.asce.org](http://www.asce.org).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>

Economy Report found that outdoor recreation activities contribute a total of \$887 billion annually to the economy and supports 7.6 million American jobs<sup>4</sup>.

Nonetheless, decades of underinvestment in our public parks infrastructure has resulted in large backlogs of deferred maintenance that threatens communities' economic stability. Fortunately, the LWCF provides a critical source of funding for the protection of natural resources and for outdoor recreation projects, including local parks, playgrounds, urban wildlife refuges, greenways, trails, and open spaces, and more than 98% of our nation's counties have a park project that has been funded by the LWCF. Since its inception in 1965, the LWCF has provided state and local governments with over 42,000 matching grants totaling over \$4 billion and leveraging much more in local and private investment. Funded through revenues generated through offshore oil and gas energy development, the LWCF comes at no cost to the taxpayer and generates \$4 in economic value for every dollar invested.

In addition to acting as strong economic, urban parks create dual-use spaces for both recreation and green infrastructure stormwater management. In fact, the LWCF has funded the development of over 25,000 sports fields in communities across the nation, many of which are designed to soak up millions of gallons of rainwater to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs). CSOs discharge untreated wastewater and stormwater, often containing agricultural runoff and toxic substances, directly into nearby bodies of water. As one of the leading sources of pollution in the nation, CSOs put the public health of communities and local ecosystems at great risk. Green infrastructure systems, such as urban parks that also function as a rain garden, use the natural environment to manage stormwater and provide co-benefits such as aesthetic value to communities, improved water quality, and cost competitiveness compared to gray forms of infrastructure.

Earlier this year, ASCE has endorsed a suite of bills to address the growing the growing funding gap in our national and public parks infrastructure investments, including the Restore Our Parks Act (S. 3172), the Restore Our Parks & Public Lands Act (H.R. 6510), and the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnerships (ORLP) Grant Program Act (H.R. 2943).

As advocates of robust investment in our nation's public parks infrastructure systems, ASCE urges Congress to not only reauthorize, but also fully fund, the LWCF. Access to and investment in our nation's public parks remains a bedrock of American society and is a critical category within ASCE's *2017 Infrastructure Report Card*. Strategic, robust, and sustained investments in these parks infrastructure systems from a variety of sources must be made quickly if we hope to close the growing funding gap. We thank you for holding this markup and for bringing attention to this critical matter, and we look forward to working with you to find solutions to our national and public parks infrastructure investment needs.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA\\_RecEconomy\\_FINAL\\_Single.pdf](https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf)