



Recommendations for the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund

2021 UPDATE

McGraw Center for Conservation Leadership

The passage of the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020 brought with it one of the most-desired outcomes in conservation history: Guaranteed full funding for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, which in its 55-year existence was only rarely funded at its full authorized level of \$900 million.

Conservationists rightly hailed the bipartisan agreement as long overdue and expressed hope that the money would serve the fund's original purpose: the acquisition and development of public lands and waters while enhancing fish and wildlife habitat.

More work remains. [A white paper written in 2015](#) for the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation's Center for Conservation Leadership noted that much had changed since the fund's inauguration:

- Congress had reflected increasing concern over federal land acquisition and program accountability
- This concern led to calls for increased congressional oversight
- Representatives and senators had expressed interest in promoting better partnerships, increased sustainability, and conservation efforts on working lands, as well as wider public/private relationships to leverage federal matching dollars.

The authors of the white paper are retired professional natural resource leaders from state and federal agencies, all well respected and nonpartisan. McGraw convened the group to seek solutions to questions that have long vexed natural resources agencies.

Decades of inadequate funding for LWCF meant that relatively little money had gone to state natural resource agencies for habitat conservation. The modernization suggested by the white paper and full funding will enable far more accomplishments.

Though the LWCF is funded by royalties on offshore drilling, not taxpayer dollars, it nonetheless is a public trust and as such should be carefully administered and

monitored, with safeguards to ensure the greatest possible economic and program efficiency. The authors of the original McGraw white paper would like to highlight some of their original recommendations to that end and assert that the need for their implementation has only grown.

We need a modern transition in LWCF policies and funding priorities, focusing on a more targeted and streamlined process with appropriate accountability. This would enable the new administration to realize strategic goals at no cost to taxpayers.

A logical first step would be the creation of a priority system to rank annual funding proposals and an organizational method to decide on the final distribution of funds for land acquisition, improved access to current lands and waters, and maintenance of current facilities. Good models for such a system already exist for the distribution of money via the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE

Establish an LWCF commission to oversee funding

Such a system would be the mechanism to evaluate, prioritize and approve disbursements from the Fund. It also would provide congressional oversight and pave the way for a non-appropriated LWCF account, similar to the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.

The commission should focus on terrestrial habitat and aquatic-based conservation projects such as river basins and entire waterways or tidal-based ecosystems. It also could serve as the oversight body if the proposed North American Grasslands Conservation Act becomes law.

The protocol for awarding grants could be structured similarly to those of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

Suggested structure

The Secretary of the Interior should chair the commission, which would be staffed by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service utilizing the USFWS Chief of Realty.

Two members each of the House of Representatives and the Senate, appointed by majority and the minority leaders in each chamber, should be voting members, as well as state and regional representatives either from state agencies and/or NGOs.

Advisors should include the Agriculture Department and the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

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RECOMMENDATION TO LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS

Create a challenge-grant partnership program for LWCF

A challenge-grant program open to non-profit private habitat-based organizations as well as local interests and partnerships that focus on conservation would drastically enhance revenue and foster stronger constituent and political support.

These groups' efforts depend on landowner stewardship agreements, easements, and a minimum of fee-title acquisition, resulting in strong community support for their projects. Clearing the way for NGOs to receive funding would be cost-effective and popular.

Matching funds are wildly popular among NGOs and would multiply the impact of every federal dollar applied to all projects.

Application process

A process similar to NAWCA grants should be followed:

- Grant applications would be prepared by the partnership sponsors in coordination with the appropriate state agencies
- Staff from the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service would review and present the proposal to the LWCF Commission
- The Commission would approve or reject the proposal
- The Fish & Wildlife Service would then monitor the grant project for full and successful completion in accordance with grant guidelines, similar to NAWCA grant requirements.

RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO LWCF STRUCTURE

Restore fish and wildlife conservation as a primary purpose of LWCF

Extraction, transport, and use of oil and gas from the outer continental shelf affects fish, wildlife, and habitat. LWCF should specifically support fish and wildlife

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Authorize LWCF expenditures to secure access

Funds should be used to secure access to existing public lands that are either landlocked or otherwise significantly restricted. It is estimated that 36 million acres of publicly owned property is totally inaccessible to the public.

Offset property tax losses

A leading argument against federally owned lands devoted to conservation is that the federal government does not pay full property taxes on its lands.

The Payments in Lieu of Taxes Act (PILT) authorizes the Interior Secretary to make annual payments to governmental units where entitlement lands are located. This would partially compensate local governments for the loss of property taxes on federal lands within their boundaries.

Over the past several years refuge revenue-sharing payments have generally been less than the full amount owed using the USFWS formula. Consequently, PILT, Refuge Revenue Sharing, and Aid to Rural Schools can and should be fully funded through LWCF to cover the entire tax deficit associated with LWCF-related land purchases.



As a new administration takes office promising to return to bipartisanship and science-based decision making, these proposals offer a way to enhance the lives of all citizens, not just those who love the outdoors. They would provide a transparent decision process and responsible governance for the billions of dollars that will flow into the fund for years to come.

The members of the McGraw team stand ready to assist in any way, from further exploration of these proposals to their implementation.

McGraw LWCF Working Group

BRENT MANNING served as senior advisor to McGraw's Center for Conservation Leadership. From 1991 to 2003, he was the top natural resources official in Illinois, first as director of the Department of Conservation and then as the first director of the Department of Natural Resources, a new umbrella agency that merged Conservation with two state agencies and parts of two more.

He oversaw the acquisition of more than 100,000 acres for conservation, and worked with state and federal officials to convert thousands of acres at closed military bases to recreational use. He won legislative approval for programs and initiatives that generated millions of dollars for conservation efforts. He later served as Executive Director of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, Illinois.

Among his many honors: The Ducks Unlimited Wetland Conservation Award, Eastern Illinois University's Distinguished Alumnus Award; the American Greenways DuPont Award, and the National Leadership Award from the National Association of State Outdoor Recreation Liaison Officers. He was named to the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame in 2005.

JOHN COOPER retired from his position as cabinet secretary of the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks in January 2007 after 12 years of service as secretary under two governors. From January 2007 until July 2008 he served as Governor Mike Rounds' senior policy advisor on Missouri River Issues, which also included serving as the first chairman of the Missouri River Association of States and Tribes. John also was a senior policy advisor to the Bipartisan Policy Center on climate change and wildlife management issues from 2007 until his retirement in 2010.

Before his appointment as Game, Fish & Parks secretary in 1995, John served 22 years with the Law Enforcement Division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He was the senior resident agent for North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska, supervising six special agents who enforced federal, state, and tribal wildlife laws.

In addition to his professional career, John served as field editor for Dakota Outdoors magazine. He has had feature articles published in Sports Afield, In-Fisherman, Western Outdoor News and Bassmaster magazine.

John also served as president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (2005-06); chairman of the National Fish Habitat Initiative Board (2005-07); and vice chairman of the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (1996-2006).

His professional awards include the 1982 and 2006 South Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society Wildlife Professional of the Year Award, the 1995 Guy Bradley Law Enforcement Professional Award, the 1991 and 2006 South Dakota Wildlife Federation Conservationist of the Year Award, the 1998 U.S. Forest Service Chief's Award for Conservation Leadership, the 2006 Wildlife Professional of the Year Award from the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, the 2006 Ducks Unlimited Conservation Achievement Award, the Outdoor Life Conservation Award for 2006 and the 2008 Seth Gordon Award for Lifetime Excellence in Conservation from the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies.

In 2009, John received the National Governors Association Award for Distinguished Service to State Government. In 2010, he received the George Bird Grinnell Memorial Award for Distinguished Lifetime Conservation Service from the Wildlife Management 16 McGraw Center for Conservation Leadership Institute. He served two years as chairman of the South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks Commission. In light of these achievements as well as his work with McGraw, John received the 2019 National Blue-Winged Teal Award from the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Committee.

He enjoys fishing, camping, hunting and spending time with his wife and family (especially his four grandsons).

KEN HADDAD retired in 2009 as executive director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The commission is a Florida constitutional agency of more than 2,500 employees with responsibility for rule-making, management, enforcement and science relative to fish and wildlife resources statewide.

As executive director, Ken was responsible for wildlife management, fisheries management, game management, endangered and threatened species management, wildlife law enforcement, and boating.

He has served as a member of the state lands Acquisition and Restoration Council, was chairman of the Science Coordinating Group of the Everglades Restoration Task Force, was a member of the Executive Committee of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and was president of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. He is a former commissioner of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and former council member of the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council.

Ken is a trustee of Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy Inc., and on the boards of Equine Land Conservation Resource and the Future of Hunting in Florida, Inc. He serves part-time as a marine advisor to the American Sportfishing Association,

a trade association of tackle and related manufacturers, retailers, and associated industries. He holds a B.S. in biology from Presbyterian College and an M.S. in marine science from the University of South Florida. He is an avid outdoorsman focusing on fishing, hunting and mounted foxhunting.

WILLIAM F. “BILL” HARTWIG is a senior advisor at Dawson & Associates. He served more than 33 years with the federal government, including 30 years within the Department of the Interior.

He served five years within the Office of the Secretary as staff director to the Federal Lands Planning Group and oversaw the annual expenditure of funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund by the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Forest Service. His next position was chief of realty for the Fish and Wildlife Service and secretary to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission before becoming assistant director of Refuges and Wildlife.

Bill was the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Midwest regional director for eight years before returning to Washington as assistant director of the Fish and Wildlife Service and chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System. He served three years on active duty in the U.S. Army as a field artillery officer and Ranger advisor to the Vietnamese Army. He worked five years for Montgomery County, Maryland, before joining the Department of the Interior. He holds a B.S. from West Virginia University and an M.S. in public administration from George Washington University.

LLOYD JONES has 30 years of resource management experience with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of National Wildlife Refuges. He has served in positions as wetland manager, project leader and refuge coordinator. Lloyd twice received the Service’s Most Outstanding Employee award. He has extensive experience in waterfowl management and conservation efforts in the Prairie Pothole Region.

He has also served as director of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department and vice president of the Delta Waterfowl Foundation. He has the unique conservation background and experience in private, state, and federal leadership positions.

Lloyd holds a B.S. in wildlife management and biology from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

SCOTT SUTHERLAND led the Washington D.C. operation for Ducks Unlimited for 22 years. During his tenure, he was primarily responsible for the organization’s relationship with members of Congress, with federal agency leadership in Washington

and with the White House. His work focused on congressional authorization, funding, and agency implementation of a broad number of programs important to waterfowl and other wildlife.

Before taking his position with Ducks Unlimited, he served on the White House staff for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. In that role he was responsible for building and maintaining relationships with key constituent groups on behalf of the president. Before his service at the White House, he was a staff member in the United States Senate, in the Alaska House of Representatives and in the Washington State Senate.

He has been a member of the Wildlife Habitat Council's board of directors and served on the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership's Policy Council. He majored in political science at the University of Washington.

About the McGraw Center for Conservation Leadership

The McGraw Center for Conservation Leadership is the nation’s leading advocate for creative and entrepreneurial thought in conservation. Nonpartisan and not for profit, the Center’s work enables informed strategic decisions rooted in economic efficiencies and science.

The Center was born from the realization that more than \$20 billion in taxpayer and private sector dollars set aside for conservation each year can be expended more efficiently.

It is a natural outgrowth of the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, created more than 50 years ago by the visionary conservationist Max McGraw, founder of McGraw-Edison Co. The Foundation, headquartered on 1,250 acres in Dundee, Illinois, aims to secure the future of hunting, fishing and land management through science, demonstration, education, and communication.

Leadership team

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CCL mission statement

Drive economic efficiencies, innovation and accountability in conservation.



McGraw Center for Conservation Leadership

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