

Department of the Interior

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Overview

What is the Land and Water Conservation Fund?

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established by Congress in 1964 to fulfill a bipartisan commitment to safeguard natural areas, water resources and cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans. The fund invests earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to help strengthen communities, preserve history and protect the national endowment of lands and waters. On August 4, 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) was signed into law, which authorized \$900 million annually in permanent funding for LWCF. Prior to the passage of GAOA, funding for LWCF was reliant on annual Congressional appropriations.

Where does the money come from?

The primary source of revenue for the LWCF is from Federal oil and gas leases on the Outer Continental Shelf. The LWCF is based on a simple concept: take revenues from the depletion of resources –offshore oil and gas – and use them to conserve other resources: parks, wildlife refuges, forests, open spaces, trails and wildlife habitat.

Where does the money go?

Money from the LWCF goes to a variety of programs that support a nationwide legacy of high-quality recreation and conservation areas. A summary of currently funded Department of the Interior (DOI) programs at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Park Service (NPS) is provided below. Some of the funds are invested by agencies to protect Federal lands for public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment – including National Parks, National Forests, and National Recreation Areas. Agencies also partner with landowners to support voluntary conservation activities on private lands. Some of the funds are distributed directly to States and local communities through grant programs. Tribes can work with States through the grant programs to secure LWCF funding for recreation and conservation projects. These grants can be used for a range of projects from establishing baseball fields and community green spaces; to providing public access to rivers, lakes and other water resources; to protecting historic and cultural sites; and conserving natural landscapes.

DOI LWCF Programs

Grant Programs

[American Battlefield Protection Program \(ABPP\)](#)

ABPP Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants (BLAG), as authorized by 54 U.S.C. §308103 and 54 U.S.C. §200305, are available to States and local governments to acquire and preserve eligible American Revolution, War of 1812, and Civil War battlefield lands. Tribes must partner with States or local governments on grant applications.

Battlefield Interpretation Grants are awarded for projects that deploy technology to modernize and enhance battlefield interpretation and education at BLAG-eligible Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War battlefield sites. These grants support critical stewardship functions by expanding access and engagement to these nationally significant sites and open spaces through more inclusive narratives and technologies. Tribes can apply directly for grants.

Battlefield Restoration Grants are awarded for restoration and resource management projects at BLAG-eligible Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War battlefield sites. These grants support sustainable, community-led efforts to preserve and protect natural and cultural resources at nationally significant sites. Tribes can apply directly for grants.

[National Park Service State and Local Assistance Programs](#)

The State-side of the LWCF provides 50:50 matching grants to States and through the States to local units of government for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities consistent with a required 5-year statewide plan articulating priority needs. Since 1965 the LWCF has provided more than \$5.2 billion through more than 44,000 grants for a wide variety of projects such as parks, sports and playfields, swimming and boating areas, trails, campgrounds, and similar. The Stateside LWCF program is comprised of two programs.

LWCF State-side formula grants are apportioned to each State, Territory, and DC based on a formula in the Act. Each State is responsible for administering competitions, selecting projects, and then submitting project applications to NPS for review and final decision on award. Tribes are eligible and apply through the State application process.

The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program is also funded through LWCF and is a separate and complementary grant program to the State-side formula grants

program. Although funding similar kinds of activities, projects should target improving recreation opportunities for economically-disadvantaged communities in larger urbanized areas that are under-served in terms of parks and other outdoor recreation resources.

Eligibility: To be eligible, a jurisdiction must have a population of at least 50,000 people and be located within an Urbanized Area as designated from the 2010 Census. Tribes who meet the jurisdiction requirement are eligible and must partner with States on grant applications.

[Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund \(CESCF\) Land Acquisition Grants](#)

CESCF Grants provide funds to States and Territories to work with private landowners, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal partners to protect and conserve Federally listed threatened and endangered species. LWCF funds two CESCF grant programs: 1.) Habitat Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Grants; and 2.) Recovery Land Acquisition Grants.

Eligibility: To be eligible for funding, State and Territorial agencies must have entered into a cooperative agreement with the FWS pursuant to section 6(c) of the Endangered Species Act. There is a minimum non-Federal cost share requirement of 25% of total project costs which is reduced to 10% for multi-State/Territory applications. Tribes must partner with States and Territories on grant applications.

[Highlands Conservation Act Grant Program](#)

In 2004, the U.S. Congress passed the Highlands Conservation Act, authorizing DOI, through FWS, to provide grant funding to eligible State agencies in the Highlands region (CT, NJ, NY, PA) to purchase and conserve land from willing sellers. This funding is appropriated annually under LWCF, and each grant is matched dollar for dollar by the recipient. The State Agency is the applicant and is the holder of the land or conservation easement. Tribes must partner with States on grant applications.

Federal Land Acquisition Programs

The BLM, NPS, and FWS use LWCF money to support individual land and water acquisition projects from willing sellers. Each bureau has a defined project selection process and criteria. Tribes can collaborate with agencies to support Federal land acquisition projects funded by LWCF.

Bureau of Land Management

The BLM receives LWCF funding to acquire lands that support specific conservation, recreation, and related projects that enhance management of and public access to existing public land and resources.

National Park Service

The Federal portion of LWCF is used to acquire lands, waters, and interests therein necessary to achieve the natural, cultural, wildlife, and recreation management objectives of NPS. LWCF monies appropriated for use by the Land Resources Program of the NPS may only be used to acquire lands within the boundaries of National Park System units.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

FWS receives LWCF funds to acquire lands and waters that meet the following conservation priorities: 1.) recovery of the threatened and endangered species where land acquisition is required by the recovery plan; 2.) implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan; and 3.) conserving migratory birds of conservation concern. Lands acquired by FWS through this program become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) or National Fish Hatchery System (NFHS).