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Subject: Fwd: Some Republicans vote to cut LWCF -- but quietly ask for the money

Interesting I thought.

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Some Republicans vote to cut LWCF -- but quietly ask for the money
From: Greg Zimmerman <greg@westernpriorities.org>
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CC:

Some Republicans vote to cut LWCF -- but quietly ask for the money

Phil Taylor, E&E reporter

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In February 2011, Rep. Robert Hurt (R-Va.) voted for an amendment by Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.) to slash funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund by 90 percent in the House's spending bill.

But the next year, Hurt urged the Forest Service to use LWCF money to acquire a 292-acre tract of privately owned forest in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, a proposal he said was strongly backed by hikers on the Appalachian Trail.

"I ask that you show my constituents' views on this issue every consideration as you move forward with your request to acquire the Campbell Tract," Hurt wrote in a [letter](#) to forest supervisor Tom Speaks. "I have received support for this acquisition from a number of my constituents, including those in Nelson County communities and others who enjoy recreational use of the Appalachian Trail in the area."

Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.) also voted for the Lummis amendment to cut LWCF.

But last September, he [urged](#) Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell to seek LWCF funding to acquire 1,100 acres of woodlands in Tennessee and North Carolina. The proposal would create roughly 6,000 contiguous acres in the Cherokee and Pisgah national forests and would preserve more than 3 miles of mountaintop ridgelines, he said.

Over the past five years, Hurt, Roe and more than a dozen other Republicans have privately lobbied

federal land management agencies to support LWCF projects in their districts, according to a records request to the agencies from *Greenwire*.

It's a break from conventional GOP wisdom that land acquisitions and other conservation spending are an unnecessary luxury for a nation mired in \$17 trillion in debt.

Enacted in 1965, LWCF is the government's main vehicle for acquiring new lands, protecting private lands and funding urban recreation. While authorized at \$900 million annually, the fund has only been appropriated that amount once and is currently funded at just over \$300 million.

Republican leaders including House Natural Resources Chairman Doc Hastings (Wash.) and Budget Chairman Paul Ryan (Wis.) have proposed sharply cutting land acquisitions until federal lands agencies tackle their multibillion-dollar maintenance backlogs, which include deferred improvements to roads, water treatment facilities and visitor centers.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies last summer floated a bill that would have -- for the first time -- zeroed out funding for LWCF.

In contrast, the Obama administration, strongly supported by conservation groups, sportsmen and mayors, in March requested \$900 million for LWCF.

"There is no better example of misplaced priorities than with the proposed full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund," Hastings said at an Interior Department budget hearing this month. "Once again, the department's budget emphasizes federal land acquisition over the proper maintenance and care of the land it already owns."

But records suggest a significant number of Republicans recognize the program's local popularity, not just as a tool for land acquisitions but also to bolster rural economies and promote urban recreation.

Greenwire submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the Forest Service, National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management for the past five years of correspondences from members of Congress seeking LWCF funding for projects in their districts.

While BLM has yet to respond, the hundreds of pages received from the Forest Service and NPS show LWCF is a priority for scores of lawmakers as it approaches its 50th anniversary. Letters were signed by 16 Republicans, 48 Democrats and three Independents who caucus with Democrats.

Some sought money for acquisition projects in their districts, but many more sought LWCF money for conservation easements that allow farmers, ranchers and forest owners to keep their lands in their open or working state. Several others lobbied the Park Service to support "state side" grants that allow local communities to acquire trails and build parks.

They include Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-Mo.), who voted for the Lummis amendment in 2011 but in November 2012 [urged](#) Interior to consider the Dallas County R-I School District's application for an LWCF grant to renovate a baseball and softball facility in Missouri.

Hartzler said she supports curbing government spending, but once money has been appropriated, she has no qualms about vying for it for her constituents.

"Congresswoman Hartzler voted to reduce funding, not eliminate it," spokesman Steven Walsh said in an email. "The program is available, and Congresswoman Hartzler is happy to support community efforts using the available funds."

Likewise, Roe said his votes for a smaller government and his lobbying for individual LWCF projects aren't mutually exclusive.

"Despite my preference that funding for these programs be reduced, I ultimately voted for appropriations bills that included this funding," Roe said. "So long as there is funding available and there are projects worthy of support in our district, I'm proud to advocate on behalf of east Tennessee."

Such lobbying is not uncommon on Capitol Hill, where fiscal conservatives routinely vote against government spending but go to great lengths to make sure money is eventually funneled home. The *Wall Street Journal* in 2010 [reported](#) that 24 Republicans who had voted against President Obama's stimulus package lobbied the Energy Department to award contracts and grants to companies and constituents in their districts.

"If they were going to build a cream cheese factory on the moon, I would fight to the death to stop it," said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), an LWCF supporter, who said he was citing former Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Texas). "But if it passed, I'd want Texas to build it.' That's a common view up here."

Graham is one of just two Republicans co-sponsoring a bill by former Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) to provide full, permanent funding for LWCF. He said the program is a wise use of taxpayer money because it expands recreation opportunities while helping landowners sustain their farms, ranches and forests.

Several other Republicans who lobbied for LWCF projects are already avowed supporters. They include Sens. Richard Burr (N.C.), Susan Collins (Maine), Kelly Ayotte (N.H.) and Lamar Alexander (Tenn.); former Sens. Scott Brown (Mass.) and Olympia Snowe (Maine); and Reps. Dave Reichert (Wash.) and Steve Daines (Mont.).

GOP support was particularly strong for LWCF projects that do not enlarge the federal estate – namely Forest Legacy projects, which typically secure conservation easements on private forestlands and keep them wooded in perpetuity.

For example, Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) in late 2009 [urged](#) the Forest Service to support South Dakota's application under Forest Legacy to acquire a 300-acre private parcel within the Blood Run National Historic Landmark, a "rare and pristine remnant of forestland in southeast South Dakota."

"It will ensure this property, which represents significant cultural, educational and recreational value, remains a protected resource for future generations," he said, noting that a past study had found the lands qualified for inclusion in the National Park System as a national historic site.

But Thune opposes the Forest Service acquiring its own new land.

A year ago, he sent a [letter](#) to Senate appropriators urging them to prioritize pine beetle management over land acquisitions, noting that the agency has a maintenance backlog of more than \$6 billion for roads, trails, campgrounds and visitor centers.

"Congress should help the Forest Service properly care for the land it currently owns before authorizing it to acquire more," he said in the letter co-signed by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) to Sens. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), leaders of the Appropriations subpanel that funds LWCF. Thune's [S. 661](#) would halt Forest Service land acquisitions for the next five years and use the money to cut timber.

Republicans over the past five years also lobbied for Forest Legacy projects in New Hampshire, Tennessee, Montana, Maine and North Carolina, among other states.

It underscores a recognition that LWCF is not just about buying federal lands, said Lynn Scarlett, managing director of public policy at the Nature Conservancy, who served as Interior deputy secretary during the George W. Bush administration.

"Increasingly, a lot of those dollars are really valued by farmers and ranchers and foresters," Scarlett said. "They're not about necessarily putting lands into the federal dominion. It's that issue that has had Republicans more concerned over time."

Over the past five years, appropriators have sent an average of 40 percent of LWCF funds to nonfederal projects including Forest Legacy, park grants and cooperative endangered species conservation funds, according to data from the Trust for Public Land. Overall, LWCF spending averaged about \$330 million over that time.

But Scarlett said the overall program -- from easements to acquisitions -- has carried bipartisan appeal for some time. For example, Bush requested full LWCF funding in his first State of the Union speech in 2001.

Last December, a bipartisan coalition of mayors lobbied Obama to request robust funding for LWCF to promote urban parks, trails and recreation areas ([E&ENews PM](#), Dec. 10, 2013). LWCF state-side grants have funded the creation of more than 42,000 state and local parks, playgrounds, urban wildlife refuges, greenways, trails and open spaces, but the Park Service estimates there is \$18.6 billion in unmet requests.

That same month, former Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, a Democrat, joined Republican billionaire Louis Bacon to form a political action committee to back candidates willing to support funding and legislation to protect federal lands ([E&E Daily](#), Dec. 12, 2013).

On its face, LWCF does not rank as a priority for many Republicans in today's Congress, Scarlett said. But that's largely because they don't recognize its economic value in expanding outdoor sporting opportunities or keeping farmers and ranchers in business, she said.

"If you pivot the narrative and really emphasize that LWCF is an investment in economies, it is an investment in community well-being, those are value sets that are bipartisan and can resonate with Republicans," she said. "These efforts are in fact not just nice to do, they are essential."

Scarlett has allies in Reps. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) and Ken Calvert (R-Calif.), the former and current chairmen of the House Appropriations panel that funds LWCF.

But the discretionary funding caps Congress set in 2013 leave little room to increase LWCF without decreasing spending for other programs. Much will depend on how much money Appropriations leaders allocate to federal lands agencies and to what extent LWCF can elbow out other high-priority programs.

Some lawmakers are hopeful Congress can provide permanent funding for LWCF as part of a broader package extending mandatory payments for counties under Secure Rural Schools and Payments in Lieu of Taxes.

Click [here](#) for the Forest Service's FOIA responses.

Reporter Nick Juliano contributed.

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