



September 29, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

The Public Lands Council (PLC) and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) would like to take this opportunity to express our stance on the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. PLC is the only national organization dedicated solely to representing the roughly 22,000 ranchers who hold federal grazing permits and operate on federal lands. NCBA is the beef industry's largest and oldest national marketing and trade association, representing American cattlemen and women who provide much of the nation's supply of food and own or manage a large portion of America's private property.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was created in 1964 to "provide money to federal, state and local governments to purchase land, water and wetlands for the benefit of all Americans." According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), lands and waters purchased through the LWCF are used to provide recreational opportunities, provide clean water, preserve wildlife habitat, enhance scenic vistas, protect archaeological and historical sites and to maintain the pristine nature of wilderness areas." LWCF is set to expire tomorrow, September 30, 2015. The program is popular and does have many benefits. However, PLC and NCBA remain concerned about the use of LWCF for land acquisition and therefore strongly oppose reauthorization without changes to how the program operates.

LWCF is the chief land acquisition tool of the federal government. The federal government already owns more than 660 million acres of land, which is approximately one-third of the entire United States landmass. Over 90% of this land is found in the West and the presence of federal land ownership greatly complicates local and state governance. Between 1965 and 2002, the LWCF, even without full funding and with the requirement of authorization from Congress for every expenditure, put \$8.7 billion toward federal acquisition and "conservation" of 4.5 million acres of land. It also gave around \$3.5 billion to state and local projects to set aside another 2.3 million acres. Congress should not be empowering land management agencies to further expand the federal estate in western communities, not to mention the removal of more natural resources from productive use in the rural west.

While PLC and NCBA believe that the federal estate is large enough and should not be expanded, we do realize that there may be certain times that land acquisition may be necessary.

However, we also believe that certain protective measures should be put in place to ensure that the tool is not abused. Whether it be approval from the Governor or legislature of the state where the potential acquisition is located, or a public comment period to allow the public to voice their concerns or support, any type of land acquisition should be handled transparently.

PLC and NCBA appreciate the opportunity to provide our input on behalf of our members – the nation’s food and fiber producers. We urge the committee to carefully examine the program and work with the ranching community as the reauthorization process moves forward to ensure that the program is being used as originally intended.

Sincerely,



Brenda Richards
President
Public Lands Council



Philip Ellis
President
National Cattlemen’s Beef Association

CC: *House Natural Resources Committee*