

The Land and Water Conservation Fund

Activist Guide 2011



Protect America's Lands!

Contact:

Lindsey Levick, The Wilderness Society, Lindsey_Levick@tws.org, (202) 429-2674
Alan Rowsome, The Wilderness Society, Alan_Rowsome@tws.org, (202) 429-2643
Maddy Pope, The Trust for Public Land, Maddy.Pope@tpl.org, (406) 522-7450 x4

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What is the Land and Water Conservation Fund?

Created by Congress in 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) represent a bipartisan commitment to safeguard natural areas, water resources and our cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans. National parks like Rocky Mountain, the Grand Canyon, and the Great Smoky Mountains, as well as national wildlife refuges, national forests, rivers and lakes, community parks, trails, and ball fields in every one of our 50 states were set aside for Americans to enjoy thanks to federal funds from LWCF.

It was a simple idea: use revenues from the depletion of one natural resource—offshore oil and gas—to support the conservation of another precious resource—our land and water. Every year, \$900 million—representing a fraction of the royalties paid by energy companies drilling for oil and gas on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS)—are put into this fund. The money is intended to purchase land from willing sellers to create and protect national parks, areas around rivers and lakes, national forests, and national wildlife refuges from development, and to provide matching grants for state and local parks and recreation projects. LWCF also helps conserve working forests, farms and ranches with conservation easement purchases across traditional landscapes supporting jobs and economic vitality in local communities.

Yet nearly every year, Congress breaks its own promise to the American people and diverts much of this funding to uses other than conserving our most important lands and waters. As a result, there is a substantial backlog of federal land acquisition needs. State governments also report substantial LWCF funding needs for eligible local parks and recreation projects.

From Large Landscapes to Your Local Community Park:

Federal Land Protection Program

The LWCF program has permanently protected nearly five million acres of public lands including some of America's most treasured assets such as Grand Canyon National Park, the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, the White Mountain National Forest, and Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, the nation's first federal refuge. Over the duration of the program, funding for LWCF has varied yearly, falling drastically in the last few years to total less than \$150 million in 2007.

Today, the four federal land management agencies (National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management) estimate the accumulated backlog of deferred federal acquisition needs to be around \$30 billion. Opportunities to protect fish and wildlife habitat, provide public access for recreation, preserve our nation's most notable historic and cultural sites, and protect scenic vistas are being lost every day to development.

State Assistance Program

The LWCF state assistance program provides matching grants to help states and local communities protect parks and recreation resources. Running the gamut from wilderness to trails and neighborhood playgrounds, LWCF funding has benefited nearly every county in America, supporting over 41,000 projects. This 50:50 matching program is the primary federal investment tool to ensure that families have easy access to parks and open space, hiking and riding trails, and neighborhood recreation facilities.

Over the life of the program, more than \$3 billion in LWCF grants to states has leveraged more than \$7 billion in non-federal matching funds. But funding levels have been unpredictable and the average annual appropriation since fiscal year 1987 is a mere \$40 million—despite the need for millions more. Today, the National Park Service reports that the unmet need for outdoor recreation facilities and parkland acquisition at

the state level is \$27 billion. While the LWCF alone cannot address all state park needs, it is a critical federal partnership with our nation's state and local parks and communities.

The USDA - Forest Service Forest Legacy Program

In recent years, LWCF funding has supported grants to states through the Forest Legacy Program to assist private landowners to conserve land, watersheds and habitat. The Forest Legacy Program provides federal funding to assist states in protecting forestlands threatened with conversion to non-forest uses. This funding may be used to acquire land outright, or to acquire a conservation easement to support sustainable working forests while providing for the protection of recreation, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The program supports timber jobs and local economies, while enhancing recreation and resource protection.

Washington Update

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Coalition: is working together to promote full and dedicated funding of LWCF. Every year, we educate and engage Congress and the White House to ensure adequate funding to LWCF through the appropriations process. Unfortunately, since 1965 when LWCF was created, Congress has not kept the promise of funding LWCF at the authorized level of \$900 million annually. Legislation is needed to ensure dedicated funding of LWCF at its authorized level to conserve our nation's treasured lands and waters, and to ensure that all Americans have access to quality parks and recreation opportunities.

Annual Budget Process: Every year, the White House proposes and Congress funds a new budget for nearly all federal agencies and programs. Funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund depends on this appropriations process for annual federal land acquisition needs, and local park and recreation grants and coalition members actively work toward increasing funds provided by Congress for LWCF every year

Congressional Action: This year, the Obama Administration proposed a budget for Fiscal Year 2012 that included full funding for LWCF at its authorized level of \$900M. The House Republican Majority, however, gutted that number in its FY12 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill (H.R. 2584), funding LWCF at only \$65.8M. This represented **a nearly 80% cut in funding**, the lowest level in the 46-year history of LWCF. This historic low proved too drastic for even Republicans in the House to support, and two successful amendments were offered to increase funding for LWCF by \$25M. This number brings LWCF out of the basement (it's the second-lowest level of funding in the program's history, rather than the very lowest of all), but it is still nowhere near adequate to provide for the nation's land conservation, watershed protection, and recreational opportunity needs. It does, however, demonstrate once again that even in the most dismal budget circumstances, LWCF maintains bipartisan support as a result of its proven track record of success in bringing communities together, creating sustainable economic development and improved quality of life to areas all across the United States

Long-Term Budget Outlook

The House of Representatives did not finish work on the FY12 Interior appropriations bill, due to growing concern about the nation's budget deficit that manifested in intense negotiations between the House, the Senate and President Obama over raising the nation's debt ceiling. In order to avoid defaulting on our financial obligations, a deal was struck to allow further borrowing to meet existing commitments while at the same time cutting federal spending by nearly \$1 trillion. These cuts will begin immediately, and persist over the next ten years. An additional \$1.5 trillion in cuts must be found by a bipartisan committee made up of both Senators and Representatives, who must present a plan that will pass both Houses of Congress by Christmas 2011. This means that there could be even further cuts to domestic discretionary spending, which includes all funding for conservation and natural resources. Unfortunately, we will have to fight for every dollar we can hope to get for LWCF by competing against other important programs in areas such as education, health care, housing and agriculture, as well as other environmental needs.

Full Funding and the Senate- S. 1265

Now more than ever, therefore, we are building support for legislation to provide full, dedicated and permanent funding for LWCF that will not be subject to the annual appropriations process. Since LWCF has its own revenue source that comes not from taxpayer dollars but from offshore oil and gas royalties, smart and honest budgeting principles dictate that these funds should go to their intended purpose without being siphoned off every year by Congress. To that end, a bill to provide full funding for The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been reintroduced in the Senate as of June 23rd, 2011. [The bill S. 1265](#), Sponsored by Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), amends the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 to stop the diversion of LWCF revenues for unrelated purposes by ensuring that the full authorized funding for LWCF -- \$900 million per year -- is dedicated expressly for land conservation and is no longer subject to reductions in the annual appropriations process.

The bill is largely unchanged from the bipartisan 2009 LWCF full-funding bill, S. 2747, which attracted 26 cosponsors. The one substantive difference, which the Coalition supports, is the inclusion of language that sets aside 1.5% of these funds (\$13.5 million per year) for projects that resolve public land access challenges for sportsmen and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts. This language was included in previous full LWCF funding provisions in the last Congress; one which passed the House (H.R. 3534, the CLEAR Act), and one which was introduced by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (S. 3663, the Clean Energy Jobs and Oil Accountability Act). While neither of these provisions got to a vote in the Senate, they are a clear demonstration of strong, enduring Congressional support for full and dedicated funding of LWCF. It is a solid foundation that we will continue to build on in the current Congress and the upcoming 2012 election cycle. We must hold both elected officials and candidates accountable for their positions on land and water conservation, and make sure they hear the voices of their constituents that care deeply about LWCF.

Talking Points for Congressional Outreach

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has done more than any other program to expand the systems of local parks, recreational green spaces and public lands enjoyed by hundreds of millions of Americans.

- LWCF is a wise investment to ensure access to public lands for hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation and support economic vitality and jobs in communities.
- LWCF positively impacts people and jobs in every state. Active outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion to America's economy every year and supports 6.5 million jobs.
- More than 87.5 million people enjoy hunting, fishing or other wildlife-related recreation, spending \$45.7 billion annually in local communities.
- Strategic land acquisitions by agencies such as the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service promotes management efficiencies and often results in significant cost-savings to agencies.
- LWCF is funded from a fraction of the proceeds from federal offshore oil and gas leasing royalties, and uses no taxpayer dollars.
- Congress intended LWCF to compensate the American people for the depletion of their resources offshore, by conserving natural resources elsewhere. Unfortunately, year after year, much of this offshore revenue is diverted to other purposes, leaving LWCF perpetually underfunded.
- Years of funding shortfalls and diversion of LWCF funds represent a broken promise to the American people. An overwhelming majority—88%—of voters support continuing to deposit fees from offshore oil and gas drilling into the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This support has been consistent over time, and includes more than 80% support among Republicans, Democrats and independents from every region of the country.
 - [Click here to read the full bipartisan poll for LWCF](#)
 - [Click here for news release on the polling information](#)
- The Fiscal Year 2011 budget cut LWCF to \$301 million, a \$149 million reduction from the previous year and less than one-half of the President's budget requests. This is a mere one-third of the program's authorized level of \$900 annually. Yet the House of Representatives' budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2012 decimates LWCF to an even greater extent—cutting the program's funding level to just \$65.8 million. This 78% cut would bring LWCF to its lowest level since the program was enacted almost 50 years ago.-
- These cuts will drastically undermine this incredibly successful bipartisan program and cause hardships for landowners, communities and local economies all across America. The President's budget for Fiscal Year 2012, by contrast, wisely recommended full funding of LWCF at \$900 million.

- Americans understand that LWCF is essential to protecting critical habitat for wildlife, conserving wetlands, watersheds, and clean water supplies, and ensuring public access for hunting, fishing, and other recreation.

Create Champions Four Easy Activities

1. Write Letters

Letters to elected leaders are more important today than ever before. Nearly 20,000 bills are introduced into each Congress. It is important you write to educate your members about the importance of your issue. It is one of the simplest ways to influence public policy.

A Few Tips: ► Identify the bill or issue. ► The letter should be timely. ► Be reasonably brief. ► Ask for a specific action. ► Ask for a response. ► Don't forget to thank your member when they have done the right thing. ► Address it properly (See below) and begin your letter with "Dear Senator Smith or Dear Congressman Smith):

The Honorable
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

(202) 224-3121 (to call the Capital Switchboard)

Since mail to the US Capitol can be quite delayed for security screening, you may wish to fax or email your letters. Find these contacts by visiting your members' website at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov

2. Organize a Successful LWCF District Meeting

Members of Congress are impressed with citizens willing to make a personal visit. You don't have to travel to Washington to meet with your congressional representatives—you can set up appointments in their district offices. Face-to-face meetings are an important opportunity to educate your member about the importance of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. There is no "right" way to do it. But, there are some guidelines that everyone follows.

A Few Tips: ► Make an appointment. Explain your purpose and whom you represent. ► Be prepared. Bring materials on LWCF. ► Whenever possible, demonstrate the connection of your issue and how it affects constituents like you. ► Ask the lawmaker specific questions to determine his or her position. ► Be prepared to answer questions.

3. Organize an LWCF Site Visit

Our greatest asset in the campaign to revitalize the Land and Water Conservation Fund is the legacy of successful projects and partnerships that LWCF has made possible. One of the best ways to further the cause is to get your representative or senator out of the office and into a park, playground, wildlife refuge, trail or other place that has benefited from LWCF.

A Few Tips: ► Use the visit as a media hook. Invite the media to come along on your site visit. Write a press release about the event and send it to your local paper. Take photos of lawmakers when they visit the site, and invite them to post the pictures on their website or include them in their district newsletter. ► Include a diverse group of local activists and site users in the event. ► Pick a rain date.

4. Attend a Town Hall meeting and speak up about LWCF

Town hall meetings are an effective venue to communicate directly with legislators while they are home in their district. Legislators often host these town hall meetings during congressional recess periods. The meetings provide the opportunity for you to urge support of LWCF. Scheduled meetings may sometimes appear on a legislator's website before we have received an updated schedule. If you would like, you can find your legislator's website by visiting www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. Many lawmakers now post news about their schedule and upcoming events on Facebook and Twitter, so utilize these resources as much as possible.

Remember, the [LWCF Coalition](#) is always here to help you with any of these activities! Please let us know if you are interested in organizing an event or a meeting with your member of Congress, and we would be happy to provide advice, talking points and written materials for you to use.

Organize a New Grassroots Constituency

Three Easy Activities

1. Build a Network of LWCF Activists

The most important method for strengthening the LWCF campaign at the local level is to organize champions to serve as ambassadors when working with elected officials, newspaper editors, or the public-at-large. A well-organized network of community leaders creates a power base that can be used to carry out the goals of the campaign in an effective manner.

A Few Tips: ► Network members should be community leaders who can make a difference in advocating for LWCF. ► Try to make your network as diverse as possible. ► Communicate with network members on a regular basis. (Be sure to keep your e-mail and phone lists of network members current so you can contact them quickly when you need their involvement.)

2. Garnering Support from Local Elected Leaders

Local elected leaders, such as mayors and county commissioners, are on the front lines of open space protection and increasing recreational opportunities. –These community officials can be very helpful in gaining audiences with newspaper editors, community leaders and state and federal representatives. Get your local elected officials to pass a resolution in support of LWCF or to write an Op-Ed or letter to the editor expressing why LWCF is important to the community.

A Few Tips: ► Use your LWCF network to set up a meeting with the official to discuss a resolution in support of LWCF as part of the larger revitalization campaign. ► Do not get frustrated if the elected official does not immediately support such a resolution, as it should be seen as a tool to gauge support for the issue and to start a conversation with the official about the importance of LWCF to your community.

3. Get Your Community Involved! Recreation Users and Local Businesses

Work with outdoor equipment retailers, chambers of commerce and other professional associations to include the LWCF message about saving land and protecting our treasured places at community centers and businesses in gateway communities to parks, forests, historic sites, and other federal, state, and local LWCF-funded places. Be sure to provide local business people with facts about the importance of LWCF for outdoor recreation and regional tourism, and remind them how much outdoor recreation contributes to your local economy.

A Few Tips: ► Go to community events or an LWCF-funded site in your community and urge support from people at trailheads, recreational facilities, state and national parks, wilderness areas and other key sites. ► Make a small, simple card (e.g. the size of a #10 envelope or a standard postcard) to hand out letting these people know how they can become involved as advocates for LWCF.

Letters to the Editor

1. Letters to the Editor: The letters to the editor (LTE) section of your local newspaper presents an ideal forum for getting out the LWCF message to readers, be they local citizens or members of your congressional delegation.

A Few Tips:

► Be clear and concise (less than 200 words). ► Focus on one point and make a compelling case. ► Include the name of the signer, address, email address, and daytime phone number.

To submit a Letter to the Editor (LTE). Go to the web site for your local paper and go to the “Opinions” section. Typically there are instructions for submission (maximum word count, where to submit the piece, how to submit the piece etc.) on this page or linked from this page.

Alternatively, print editions should have submission information on the Opinions page or call the general information number for the paper and tell them that you would like to submit a letter to the editor and need to know who to send it to and what the guidelines are. Be sure to include your name and address (so they know that you are a local citizen) and affiliation if any; the paper may also ask for a biography.

Draft LTE (Letter to the Editor)

In [State, City, and region – whatever is most relevant], places such as [insert a couple of examples of well-known/well used parks] have benefited from an important conservation program called the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Unfortunately, most of the money designated for this fund has been diverted by Congress to pay for other, unrelated programs. This is true in spite of the fact that LWCF funds are intended specifically for conservation, and in spite of the role these [parks/open spaces/battlefields] play in our local economy.

Right now, Congress has proposed drastically cutting—or even eliminating—LWCF, even though it uses absolutely no taxpayer dollars. Our congressional delegation can play an important role in protecting this program, which has benefited [state name] since 1965. I hope our elected leaders hear us and restore this national commitment to our outdoor recreation heritage.

Name

Affiliation

Address

Phone number

Email address

****When submitting your LTE or Op-Ed, be sure to paste it into the body of your email and also attach it as a word document**

Draft Op-Ed (Opposite Editorial)

How to Place an LWCF Op-Ed

The name “op-ed” comes from the words “opposite editorial,” for the location where many newspapers publish opinion pieces submitted by columnists, community opinion leaders or others who are not regular members of the paper’s editorial staff. Although most newspapers keep an open mind in determining the content of their op-eds, some newspapers will be more inclined to publish a contributed opinion piece on LWCF than others.

-That’s why it is important to research the newspaper in advance to understand what kind of editorials it publishes, as well as what issues are covered in the news stories that appear on its pages. Remember that a newspaper will not publish an op-ed unless it feels it represents a unique or different perspective.

Before you write your op-ed, consider who would be the best person to “sign” it. A local newspaper is more likely to publish an op-ed piece by a community leader, so you might consider recruiting the head of a local recreation or historic preservation organization, the owner of a local outdoor retailer, an elected official or a well-known community member like a high school coach.

Once you have decided who will author your op-ed, check the newspaper’s website for op-ed guidelines. Call or e-mail, with the op-ed page editor to discuss your ideas and the subject you wish to write about. If they agree to publish your LWCF piece, make sure you strictly observe all length requirements and copy deadlines.

Many newspapers require op-eds to be “exclusive” to that paper; be sure to find out in advance, since submitting the same piece to more than one paper at the same time could spoil your chances of having your op-ed published anywhere.

In addition, newspapers (especially large city papers) will not knowingly publish “ghost-written” op-eds. It is important that the person whose name appears on the piece be the one to submit it to the newspaper. Finally, if the op-ed is printed, write a thank you note to the editor and keep them in touch to update them with additional information on the LWCF campaign.

What to say in an LWCF Op-Ed

When writing to an LWCF op-ed, consider the following outline:

Give a concise, but thorough, background on LWCF—remember the majority of people reading the op-ed will never have heard of LWCF. The fact that LWCF uses no taxpayer dollars is particularly important in the current budget climate. A brief summary of LWCF and how it works will be important to set the stage for the information that follows.

Urge consistent and robust funding of LWCF— main message of your op-ed should mirror that of the national LWCF campaign, since it is important to maintain a consistent message in all media-generating activities. If nothing else, the reader of your op-ed should come away understanding the main goal of the campaign: to assure consistent and robust funding for LWCF. Check out the coalition’s website for talking points and messaging.

Localize the story—Although LWCF has been responsible for the acquisition of millions of acres throughout the U.S., your local newspaper will only publish your op-ed if it makes a clear connection to LWCF’s benefits in your local community and your state. Provide specific examples of well-known local parks and recreation areas created or improved with LWCF funding, and give some examples of how LWCF will be important to the future of outdoor recreation in your community. [Good examples can be found in the “LWCF in your State” section.](#)

Highlight the Need for Congressional Support of LWCF—the op-ed allows you to stress the importance of support for LWCF from both locally and nationally elected officials. Draw attention to the fact that full funding for LWCF will not occur without leadership from your state’s members of Congress.

Remember, we are here to help! [The LWCF Coalition](#) has communications and media staff professionals who may have reached out to your local paper before, and would be happy to work with you to help improve the chances that your LTE or Op-Ed will be published.

Sample Letter to your Member of Congress

Dear Senator/Congressman,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Specifically, I urge your support of a permanent solution for funding LWCF during the 112th Congress to protect some of America’s most important natural areas, including national parks and forests, working farms, forests and ranches, and state and local parks. LWCF represents solid economic investment in all of our states that benefit a wide range of communities.

Outdoor recreation, much of which takes place on lands protected by LWCF, is vital to our nation’s economy. Hunting, fishing, camping, climbing, hiking, paddling, backcountry skiing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, and other activities contribute a total of \$730 billion annually to the economy, supporting 6.5 million jobs and stimulating 8 percent of all consumer spending according to the Outdoor Industry Foundation. Nine in ten voters oppose any diversion of funding from the LWCF—and most of that number would like to see money from past diversions replaced. - When lands are lost to development, both the outdoor spaces and the economic benefits they provide are lost.

Over the forty-six year history of the program more than \$17 billion of the Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas revenues deposited into LWCF have NOT been spent as the bipartisan LWCF Act intended and have been diverted for other purposes. Congress should ensure honest budgeting for LWCF and finally direct a portion of the proceeds of offshore oil drilling to their originally intended purposes for the benefit of all Americans and the places where they live, work and play.

LWCF protects some of America’s most special outdoor places. Investments in important wildlife and recreational habitat ensure that public lands stay public for hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreationists. Protecting historic places such as Civil War battlefields connect communities to their outdoor heritage and attract visitors from across the country. With the coming 150th anniversary of the Civil War and the intense development pressure that many battlefields face, these investments are important now more than ever.

LWCF has always been and continues to be a bipartisan commitment that has strong support among diverse communities in every state. During the 112th Congress, we hope that you will work with us to craft a permanent solution for LWCF to the benefit of the American people.

Fax or email your letter to your member of Congress

Find their contact information at www.house.gov or www.senate.gov

Organizing a Successful LWCF District Meeting

Meet with local staff or better even your member of Congress while they are home in the District

Getting Started

- Organize a meeting that focuses exclusively on LWCF, rather than lumping it with other programs
- Use local examples of LWCF projects and local people to describe them.
- Be very persistent in scheduling a meeting
- Organize a diverse group of district residents, including local elected officials, local and state park directors, park and recreation advocates, conservation organizations and land trusts, representatives from the Governor's office, local business owners, local landowners, and youth sport professionals.
- Bring an information packet that includes the following:
 - A copy of the LWCF Talking Points (which can be found [here](#))
 - [A list of local or state LWCF-funded projects](#) (LWCF fact sheets for every state can be found on the LWCF Coalition's website at <http://bit.ly/9xgVCn>)
 - Letters of support from local and state elected officials, smart growth leaders, recreation businesses and youth sports advocates
 - The Campaign Petition Sheet signed by the Member's constituents-(An example letter to Senate Majority Leader Reid from over 900 supportive organizations: <http://bit.ly/ri9Hcc>)
 - [A General fact sheet about LWCF](#) (Or go to this webpage <http://bit.ly/qAYsOXf>)
 - Relevant newspaper clippings: <http://bit.ly/p7nhDv>
 - Additional materials such as draft letters, legislative proposals and other pertinent information

What to Ask for

- Become an LWCF Champion in Congress
- Co-sponsor legislation that follows the Campaign's 5 Guiding Principles
- Encourage other members of Congress to support LWCF
- Set up an LWCF Site Tour

How to Organize the Meeting

*Make an appointment: Submit a request for a meeting in writing including who will be in attendance.

*Be persistent. Call back every couple of days until you actually get a meeting scheduled.

Pull together your delegation:

*The ideal meeting has no more than five people. It's best if each attendee represents a different group of constituents. There should be a group leader, ideally someone who knows the member or one of the member's staff and can serve as a moderator for the group, take notes, and follow up with the member's staff.

Prepare for your meeting:

*Develop goals and an agenda for the meeting.

*Do your homework on the Member's record as it relates to LWCF. Also, try to determine your Member's strengths and weaknesses as a legislator, his allies and whether or not he or she is perceived by congressional colleagues as a leader.

*Hold the District Meeting:

*Be on time.

*Stay on topic and make sure you focus on the 5 Guiding Principles.

*Get an actual commitment from the Senator or Representative to do something specific.

Follow Up

- Send a thank-you letter to the member reiterating your message and any commitment on his or her part.
- Keep in touch with the member's staff to ensure any commitments made during the meeting are kept.

Again, remember that we are here to help!

Feel free to call or email us @ info@lwcfcoalition.org in advance of your meeting and we'll be happy to share whatever insight the LWCF Coalition has gained over the years about meeting with members, the current political climate, and your member in general.