**Land and Water Conservation Fund**

**National 6(f) Site Directory**

**Summary Objective**

NASORLO supports the creation of a Geographic Information System-based inventory of all Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) sites at the state, county, city and town levels. This national database will reference all LWCF land acquisitions and outdoor recreation facility development sites - approximately 39,500 total project locations – that are protected under Section 6(f) of LWCF Act. We seek and support avenues that will create a national database framework that will serve multiple purposes, including but not limited to, baseline information for advocacy and comparative analyses related to the delivery of public parks and outdoor recreation facilities.

**Background**

In 2015 the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act will celebrate its 50th anniversary since becoming law in 1965. This epic bipartisan Act has appropriated over $3.6 billion that was invested in acquisition, development and planning outdoor recreation opportunities in the United States and its territories. Every geographic region of the US, every county, and nearly every city or town has a park funded through the Act. Almost 2.6 million acres of park lands have been preserved in perpetuity while nearly 29,000 LWCF projects resulted in outdoor recreation facilities. An equivalent, if not greater aggregate, of state, local and private funds matched LWCF grants for an investment of at least $7.2 billion nationwide in state and local parks. Seventy-five percent of the total funds obligated are invested in close-to-home recreation opportunities readily accessible to America’s youth, adults and senior citizens.

Information on all LWCF sites is collected by every state and the National Park Service, though no single electronic database reflects the history of investments or provides a sweeping view of public resources. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology provides the tools necessary for LWCF program managers to streamline the tracking and management of LWCF investments. While some states have already built robust LWCF GIS databases, many have not. States with LWCF data in a GIS system already have the ability to easily track, analyze and monitor LWCF projects and visually demonstrate where investments have been made since the program’s inception.

Despite budget constraints, it is critically important to demonstrate site specific LWCF projects locations and public investments made. A single unified GIS database containing all LWCF projects completed since the program’s inception in 1965 would make it possible to spatially track and analyze LWCF investments on a national scale, enhance ability to steward perpetual obligations, offer the public resource information, and foster a national dialogue on the program’s impact on Americans.

**About GIS Data for LWCF Areas**

Although some states have created detailed datasets with polygon data (geospatial) with and extensive relational data, that level of detail goes beyond what is needed to begin utilizing GIS to track investments on a national scale. A national GIS system containing points representing a LWCF investment area and minimal relational data will revolutionize the way LWCF investments are tracked. A national GIS database will allow states and NPS to spatially analyze and extract data in ways that are not possible using only tabular databases. Some examples include:

* Easy tracking of investments to ensure lands remain protected in perpetuity as required by the LWCF program.
* Improved tracking and visualization of LWCF investments and the ability to easily query the data based on a multitude of spatial possibilities for reports, analysis, and displays.
* The ability to model the data in a variety of ways and perform gap analysis to determine areas for future investments.
* Public friendly user interface - the ability to create an interactive web map showing LWCF projects nationwide as a tool to inform the public where investments have been made and to help the public locate recreational opportunities.

For those states that lack the minimum GIS data, creation of the data will require an investment in time and money to develop, though the value greatly outweighs the cost. GIS will be an invaluable tool for visually demonstrating the effectiveness of the LWCF program since its inception nearly 50 years ago.

**Demonstration Project**

With authorization for LWCF expiring in 2015 and desire for program continuation, it is critically important to demonstrate the success of the program over the past 50 years to gain public and political support. It is also imperative that NASORLO and its partners demonstrate the ability to both track and steward the lands previously acquired under LWCF.

To create GIS-based inventory of all LWCF sites at the state, county, city and town levels, NASORLO would first develop a demonstration project. Several GIS platforms were evaluated to determine if one is efficiently adaptable to development a proof of concept demonstration displaying LWCF 6(f) protected areas. Platforms considered and evaluated:

* USGS’s Protected Areas Database of the US (PAD-US) program has focused on capturing such data about large park and conservation areas and has a robust national GIS database.
* NRPS’s PRORAGIS (Park and Recreation Operating Ratio & Geographic Information System) is a national database that allows park and recreation agencies to benchmark with others, develop program planning, and enhance park operations.
* TPL’s Conservation Almanac covers land area conservation activity across the United States and includes sites, though not all sites, acquired with LWCF assistance. The Conservation Almanac is a work in progress containing data from 1998 to 2005.

Of these three data platforms, the PAD-US program can be immediately adapted to house and disseminate a LWCF 6(f) demonstration project. USGS has agreed to develop point locations and basic, yet key, relational data for LWCF areas using GIS information provided by a few states that have built these data. California, Delaware, Washington, Texas, and Pennsylvania have agreed to participate in a demonstration offering their LWCF 6(f) geospatial and relational data. Rhode Island and Kansas have been contacted and may possibly be incorporated in the test project. Relational data will be simple and include the following: park name; sponsor/manager/agency owner; 6(f) acres; LWCF investment; local investment; and closeout date for the project will revolutionize the way LWCF investments are tracked. To further the development of a national 6(f) directory, TPL is collaborating by providing data point locations and relational data from its Conservation Almanac – specifically those sites where LWCF assistance helped acquire land. Data developed from a national directory will help populate the Conservation Almanac. We expect TPL continue as partner in determining the future path of the directory.

**Next Steps**

While it is ideal to develop a national LWCF 6(f) directory that is robust reflecting spatial boundaries – those cited in 6(f) maps associated with each grant project and details linked to every grant file - an effort of that magnitude will be lengthy and require extensive resources. Using point data and key attribute information, a demonstration project can be quickly assembled prior to NASORLO’s Annual Meeting in September 2013.

The next steps foreseen and envisioned:

* Agreement from potential states to participate in a LWCF 6(f) Directory demonstration project based on the PAD-US platform.
* Potential summer meeting with key NASORLO members, and NPS, USGS, NRPA, TPL, CDC staff. Potential agenda: evaluate demo; determine avenues to expand demo to include additional states capturing all states and territories; avenues to expand data assembly; partners; seek private funders
* Near-term decisions: Where will national directory be housed ultimately; how to advance to a viable directory with a user-friendly public interface; determine advocacy uses of data; development of a national data-sheet similar to state LWCF data sheets.
* Long-term decisions: How to evolve from a point data set to boundary-based data set.