



# Land & Water Conservation Fund National LWCF Directory

## Summary Objective

The protection provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund ensure that assisted parks will provide benefits in perpetuity - a conservation and recreation legacy of the Stateside LWCF Program that impacts citizens nationwide today and will for generations to come. The National Association of Outdoor Recreation Liaison Officers (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 every LWCF land acquisition and outdoor recreation facility development sites - approximately 39,500 total project locations - that are protected under Section 6(f)(3) 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: a comprehensive view of the nationwide legacy of conservation and recreation investments; baseline information for advocacy and constituency building; 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 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary since becoming law in 1965. Through this epic bipartisan Act, Congress 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 assets from state, local and private sources were leveraged to match LWCF grants - a total investment of at least \$7.2 billion nationwide. 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 these public resources. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology provides the tools necessary for LWCF Stateside managers and researchers track, manage, and evaluate past and future investments. While some states have built robust LWCF GIS databases, many have not. States with LWCF data in a GIS system today 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 project 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 outdoor recreation 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 extensive datasets with polygon data records and extensive relational data that 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:

- Streamline tracking and management of every investment 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.
- Evaluate fulfillment and health-related models that inform program impacts.
- Evaluation tool to inform and improve future investment strategies that most meet outdoor recreation, children in nature and health-related goals and objectives.
- 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 past successes 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 a GIS-based inventory of every LWCF site at the state, county, city and town levels, NASORLO and its partners will develop a proof of concept demonstration. Several GIS platforms have been evaluated to determine if one is efficiently adaptable to development a demonstration to convey 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.
- NRPA's PRORAGIS (Park and Recreation Operating Ratio & Geographic Information System) is a national database that allows park and recreation agencies to benchmark their operation and management, develop program planning, and enhance park operations. Populating the database relies on local input.
- TPL's Conservation Almanac covers land 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 can be immediately adapted to house and disseminate an 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 data readily available. California, Delaware, Washington, Texas, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Kansas have agreed to participate in a demonstration offering their LWCF 6(f) geospatial and relational data. Relational data will be simple and include the following:

park name; sponsor/manager; 6(f) acres; LWCF investment; local investment; closeout date for the project; and potentially the grant identification number.

To further the development of a national LWCF 6(f) directory, TPL is collaborating by providing point locations and relational information from its Conservation Almanac – specifically those sites where LWCF assistance helped acquire land. Data developed from a national directory will in turn help populate the Conservation Almanac. We expect TPL to continue as a partner as the future path is determined.

### **Next Steps**

While it is ideal to develop a national LWCF 6(f) directory that is robust reflecting spatial boundaries – like those cited in 6(f) maps associated with each grant project and details linked to every grant file - an endeavor of that magnitude will be lengthy and require extensive resources. Furthermore, while this direction will be considered as long term goal, more immediate results can be achieved using point data and key attribute information in the proof of concept demonstration. This can be quickly assembled prior to NASORLO's Annual Meeting in September 2013. While the steps ahead are expected to evolve, a few implementation and discussion points are offered below:

- Agreement from potential states to participate in a LWCF 6(f) Directory demonstration project based on the PAD-US platform.
- Meeting with key NASORLO members, and NPS, USGS, NRPA, TPL, CDC and GreenInfo Network staff to frame immediate, mid-term and long-term goals. Potential agenda: evaluate demo; determine avenues to expand demo to capture data from all states and territories; avenues to expand data assembly; partners; seek private funders.
- Discussion points: Where will a national directory ultimately be housed; 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; how to evolve from a point data set to boundary-based data set.

**NASORLO -- National LWCF 6(f) Directory Demonstration**  
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