

**An American Network of Parks and Open Space:
Creating A Conservation and Recreation Legacy**

**White Paper Prepared by the
LWCF/UPARR Review Committee**

**Approved by the NPS Advisory Board
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	Page 2
Introduction - A Time For Change	Page 6
The Vision - An American Network of Parks and Open Space	Page 7
The Benefits - What We Can Achieve	Page 9
Problem Statement - Why We Can't Achieve Our Goals With the Existing Programs	Page 13
Recommendations - An Initiative for the Next Generation	Page 15
o An American Partnership for Recreation and Conservation	Page 15
o Building Partnerships - Program Integration	Page 17
o Non-profit Partners	Page 18
o Program Administration - A Focal Point is Needed	Page 19
o Program Funding	Page 20
Conclusion	Page 22
Footnotes	Page 23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In January, 1994, Roger Kennedy, the Director of the National Park Service, asked the National Park System Advisory Board to convene a committee to review the state and local portion of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and other similar assistance programs, such as the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR). The Advisory Board formed an eighteen member Review Committee comprised of knowledgeable individuals from around the country. The committee's charge was to,

"Advise the Director and the Secretary on the current status of state and local assistance programs and make recommendations on how the programs could be improved, both under existing legislation and under new legislation."

The committee met numerous times between January - July 1994. This document is the Review Committee's report to the Advisory Board.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

After extensive deliberations, the Review Committee reached strong consensus on the following recommendations:

- **The LWCF and UPARR programs should be combined into a single new program.**
- **A new institution within the federal government, but outside of the Department of Interior, should be created to manage the new program.**
- **An annual federal appropriation of \$1 billion dollars will be required to meet the recreation and conservation needs of our citizens.**
- **The new program should actively involve citizens in establishing funding priorities and planning for the development of an American Network of Parks and Open Space.**

INTRODUCTION

Thirty years ago this year, in a remarkable bipartisan effort, Congress and the President created the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) which was intended to be a permanent source of financing for purchasing federal park land and for aiding the purchase, construction and renovation of state and local parks. However, the early vision of the LWCF has been lost. Less than adequate appropriations continue for federal land acquisition, while the anticipated appropriations for state and local assistance have been meager, far less than the original legislation intended.

The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR) was created in 1978. It, too, was a visionary effort aimed at creating a recreation partnership between the federal government and distressed cities. Unfortunately, dramatically reduced funding has also erased the early promise of UPARR.

THE VISION - AN AMERICAN NETWORK OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Land and Water Conservation Fund/Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program Review Committee believes the LWCF and UPARR funds can and should be revitalized. But the first step in reclaiming these two important programs is the creation of a new vision for America's recreation and conservation resources.

We envision a network of parks, preserves, open spaces, greenways and recreation areas stretching across this nation, touching all communities, and accessible to all Americans. This network will be crafted by new partnerships among local, state and federal governments and the private sector, and will be based upon the active involvement and participation of a broad spectrum of citizens.

THE BENEFITS - WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE

During the last thirty years a great deal has changed about how we value recreation and conservation pursuits. The potential benefits are enormous. Recreation and conservation programs can:

- Contribute to the health and well being of individuals and communities.
- Create jobs and bring economic benefits to communities.
- Provide opportunities for American youth.
- Increase the amount of natural habitat, forest lands, wetlands, cultural sites, and recreation lands we are preserving.
- Build a system of parks and open space around the changing habits of the American people.
- Rebuild existing facilities that are outdated and being forced to close.

PROBLEM STATEMENT - WHY WE CAN'T ACHIEVE THESE GOALS WITH THE EXISTING PROGRAMS

The current LWCF and UPARR programs are not meeting our citizens' most urgent needs because resources have been insufficient, and the programs are not organized in a way to help us achieve our vision. The following list describes some of the major shortcomings of the two programs.

- There has been a lack of vision and leadership by national public officials regarding advocacy for park, recreation and open space issues.
- There is poor coordination between federal, state and local agencies, and among the federal agencies.
- Funding levels have been dramatically reduced.
- There is insufficient flexibility to allow communities to shape projects that will meet urgent local needs.
- The administration of the LWCF and UPARR programs does not provide sufficient support to meet our recreation and conservation needs.
- There is a splintered, ineffective constituency for the LWCF and UPARR programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS - AN INITIATIVE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

An American Partnership for Recreation and Conservation

Our vision for an **American Network of Parks and Open Space** will require a departure from the ways in which the LWCF and UPARR funds have been used, managed and funded. The Review Committee recommends that the LWCF and UPARR programs be combined into a single new program. We are convinced that achieving our goal will require an annual federal commitment of \$1 billion dollars.

The funds from the combined LWCF and UPARR programs should be distributed based on the following formula.

- 30 percent to federal agencies.
- 30 percent allocated to state governments.
- 30 percent allocated to urban areas.
- 10% reserved for national priorities, as designated by Congress.

It is also recommended that funding for the federal portion of the new program not drop below the level of LWCF funding for federal conservation programs, averaged over the last five years. Non-profits should be eligible to apply to any of the four categories of funds in partnership with the appropriate governmental agency.

Building Partnerships - Program Integration

One of the keys to establishing an **American Network of Parks and Open Spaces** is the building of partnerships among the American people. To accomplish this vision the new program should encourage and support a simple, streamlined planning process. It should be flexible enough to utilize existing state and local planning efforts, but strong enough to insure extensive grassroots involvement and intergovernmental collaboration. Local, state and federal governments and non-profits should participate in the cooperative development of state recreation resource and open space plans, designed by state and local governments to meet general criteria.

Program Administration - A Focal Point is Needed

The management and organizational nurturing of the proposed program are as important as new resources. A national focal point is essential for this proposal to succeed.

The Review Committee recommends that a new Commission for Recreation and Conservation be created outside of the Department of Interior. The Commission for Recreation and Conservation would be a new governmental entity, providing a single-minded focus on creating an **American Network of Parks and Open Space**. The Commission should oversee the operation of the new program.

Program Funding

The first priority for securing additional funds should be the offshore oil and gas lease (OCS) revenues. Congress has authorized an appropriation level of \$900 million per year for the LWCF, although the actual appropriation has averaged \$250 million annually during the past ten years. The UPARR program receives only \$5 million annually.

CONCLUSION

Our national failure to invest and reinvest in parks, preserves and recreation programs is jeopardizing America's national heritage of scenic, natural and cultural places, is damaging the lives of our families, hampers economic growth, and is diminishing the opportunities for our children, and their children to enjoy decent and productive lives.

With a new vision and creative leadership we can change this. We can create an **American Network of Parks and Open Space** that will be a proud legacy for future generations.

AN AMERICAN NETWORK OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACE: CREATING A CONSERVATION AND RECREATION LEGACY

I. INTRODUCTION - A TIME FOR CHANGE

For more than two centuries we Americans have been creating parks and open space - protecting places that inspire and enrich our lives. Parks and playgrounds, public forests and preserves, wild and scenic rivers, trails and greenways, wildlife refuges and recreation centers, have fostered a set of values that we treasure as a nation: appreciation of the outdoors, participation in sports and teamwork with others, caring for our natural and cultural heritage, providing opportunities for personal challenge and adventure, conserving our environment, and bringing together families and communities to foster mutual understanding and respect.

These values, these benefits are not trivial additions to the course of our lives. If, on some Saturday morning the gates of every park, beach and boat launch ramp were closed, if the baseball and basketball leagues were shut down, if children were barred from playgrounds and families were unable to use a favorite picnic grove or campground, if, at the same time, the auctioneer's gavel hammered out the sale of publicly owned redwoods and riverbanks, of mountain peaks and pristine lakes, we would as a nation feel an overwhelming sense that an essential part of our lives was being lost.

And yet, as is the case today, when we seek ways to address the pressing problems of urban crime and despair, of young people at risk, of families and communities pulling apart, of a deteriorating environment, of spiraling health care costs and of a growing sense of loneliness and uncertainty among so many Americans, we have not utilized the immense value of local, state and national parks, recreation centers and protected lands in addressing all of these problems.

It has not always been so. Thirty years ago this year, in a remarkable bipartisan effort, Congress and the President created the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) which was intended to be a permanent source of financing for purchasing federal park land and for aiding the purchase, construction and renovation of state and local parks. The authors in effect promised that money would be available to help create a system of parks and open space designed to "...assist in preserving, developing, and assuring accessibility to all citizens of the United States of America of present and future generations....such quality and quantity of outdoor recreation resources as may be available and are necessary and desirable for individual active participation...".

In recent years, however, that promise has been broken. While less than adequate appropriations from the Fund continue for federal land acquisition, appropriations for state and local assistance have been meager, far less than the original legislation intended. Grants to states, and through them, local governments, have become too small and too rigidly administered to meet today's needs.

The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR) was created in 1978 as a result of a congressionally mandated examination of the condition of recreation resources in major urban areas. It, too, was a visionary effort aimed at creating a recreation partnership between the federal government and distressed cities. UPARR was designed to help cities rehabilitate existing parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, swimming pools, tennis and basketball courts, ball fields and to provide recreation programs. The focus then and now is on poorer communities where recreation needs are great. Unfortunately, dramatically reduced funding has also erased the early promise of UPARR.

Even so, state and local governments, often working with private partners, have historically committed their own resources, even through difficult economic times, to meet the recreation needs of a growing population and to set aside lands with important natural and cultural value. Their accomplishments, working frequently without federal assistance, have been heroic. But without federal leadership and assistance they cannot sustain this effort.

Today, across this nation, we face a crisis of broken, littered playgrounds, of graceful urban parks in such disorder and disrepair that families stay away, of an increasingly overweight and out of shape population incurring soaring health care costs, of vanishing habitat for plant and animal species, of development sprawling along the shores of once rural estuaries and river valleys, of pieces of our heritage of natural and cultural places being lost forever. In many ways, in many places, the park gates are closing, and Americans and America will be the worse for it. But this does not have to be so.

II. THE VISION - AN AMERICAN NETWORK OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Land and Water Conservation Fund/Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program Review Committee believes the LWCF and UPARR funds can and should be revitalized. The potential benefits are considerable. But the first step in reclaiming these two important programs is creation of a new direction, a redefinition of strategic partnerships - a vision for America's recreation and conservation resources.

We envision a network of parks, preserves, open spaces, greenways and recreation sites and centers stretching across this nation, touching all communities, and accessible to all Americans. This network will be crafted by new partnerships among local, state and federal governments and the private sector, and will be based upon the active involvement and participation of a broad spectrum of citizens.

Many pieces of the network are in place today. From the local wooded flood plain in Mississippi to the forests of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem, from the JFK Recreation Center in Newark to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco, from the Knight Island State Park campground in Vermont to the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma, and from the Boulder, Colorado greenway and trail system to the

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Alaska, we have worked hard to acquire a diverse collection of places that inspire and enrich the American people.

However, many portions of this magnificent collection of local, state, federal and private places are incomplete and unprotected, or not considered as a part of an interrelated system that should be working together. Decisions regarding funding, acquisition and development, maintenance and operations, and management of resources, are too often made in isolation, based on jurisdictional boundaries instead of ecological boundaries, efficient public service, or citizen interests. We must reorient our thinking to understand and appreciate the mutual importance and interdependence of the rich mosaic of recreation and conservation resources.

A true **American Network of Parks and Open Space** will also help us insure that all Americans have access to quality recreation experiences and benefit from resource conservation. Today, access is too often dependent upon family income or the proximity of a nearby park or open space. As a result, many working class families are flocking to crowded, often overused state and local facilities and natural areas. Many families do not have access to safe, convenient recreation services, nor do they have the opportunity to experience a regional forest or a mountain stream. With limited resources, we must be more strategic about setting priorities that will provide a full range of recreation and conservation opportunities for all of our citizens.

We must draw together individual citizens with local, state and federal governments and private entities in a cooperative process to define the location, character and use of such a national network. By working together we can nourish these areas, repair and conserve them, and create new public places which will help sustain our natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of future generations.

The creation of the network should be guided by the following principles:

1. Priorities for spending funds must flow from citizens involved in local, state and national planning activities. Planning for the network must actively involve broad segments of the public in determining their future.
2. Programs for land conservation, preservation of cultural landscapes, and park development require a shared partnership among citizens, private landowners, all levels of governments and with private non-profit organizations.
3. The equity of private property owners must be respected in the implementation of recreation and conservation programs.
4. We must strive for equal access to recreation opportunities and equal environmental quality for all Americans.
5. National strategies and programs which aid state and local governments should be flexible, effective, and efficient.

III. THE BENEFITS - WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE

During the last thirty years a great deal has changed about how we value the benefits from recreation and conservation pursuits. Where we once described the benefits of "leisure activities" in terms of personal enrichment, we now understand the benefits to be far more complex, varied and far reaching. In fact, the current scientific literature is filled with evidence that active recreation has a positive affect on the physical health and well being of individuals, and that public conservation strategies contribute to the economic vitality of our communities. The potential benefits are enormous. They are also cost effective and sustainable. Enhancement of the LWCF and UPARR programs would benefit millions of citizens of all ages and interests, now, and for generations to come. The following is a summary of the most significant benefits.

1. Contribute to the health and well being of individuals and communities. The current national debate about health care reform has taught us many things about our country's health care system. For example, we know that the United States spends more for health care than any nation on earth - \$898 billion in 1993, or an estimated \$3,358 per person. That represents 14 percent of our gross national product. We have also learned that in order to keep costs down, future health care strategies must focus on prevention. Our ability to control costs will be, in part, related to our ability to stay out of the doctor's office.

The most important prescriptions for creating effective preventive care are regular exercise and a moderate diet. Enhanced recreation opportunities could become the basic building blocks in the wellness revolution. According to the 1990 Healthy People 2000 report, there is increasing evidence that light to moderate physical activity, often associated with recreation behavior, can have significant health benefits. The report recommends several appropriate actions, including significant investments in recreation resources, such as areas for hiking, biking and swimming.

In addition, our ability to control daily stress is believed to have a significant effect on our health and overall quality of life. It has been widely demonstrated that exercise and recreation activities can reduce stress.

2. Create jobs and bring economic benefits to communities. One of the most powerful, and often overlooked, strategies for creating sustainable communities is the development of new recreation and conservation opportunities. In 1988, the Domestic Policy Council Task Force on Outdoor Recreation estimated that the economic value of outdoor recreation ranges between \$122 - \$132 billion each year. Experience suggests that parks and open spaces can deliver economic returns and make significant contributions to long term sustainability.

Recreation and conservation activities attract thousands of visitors to host communities. The dollars tourists invest in services, commodities, and food provide an economic boost for many local economies. The thriving sales of recreation

equipment and the growth of numerous recreation services, such as outfitters and guides, is dependent upon attractive and accessible recreation and conservation lands.

Construction or rehabilitation of park facilities, trails, roadways, or interpretive centers can be an important source of construction and supplier jobs. Once built, the permanent facilities prompt other, long-term investments and jobs - such as concession stands, hotels and inns, restaurants, rental shops, map publishers, and event organizers.

Many American cities have successfully redeveloped decaying downtowns using park investment as their focal point. Many rural communities have pumped new life into their local economies by taking advantage of a neighboring recreation area or popular trail system. The proximity to parks and open spaces has generally been shown to increase real estate values. (Footnote 1)

In addition, several important new trends are emerging. Recreation opportunities are likely to be prominent factors influencing decisions by retirees about where to relocate. Every year 250,000 retirees move to another state. (Footnote 2) The potential economic benefits from these family relocations are significant. There is also information that suggests that business relocation decisions are partly based on the availability of park and recreation systems and open space opportunities. A recent survey suggests that companies that have great flexibility in where they locate (those not tied to raw materials, energy supplies or customer locations), make decisions based on the quality of life for their employees. For these companies, most of them new high technology firms, recreation and conservation resources are fundamental to their definition of a community's quality of life. (Footnote 3)

Finally, some natural systems can provide fiscally attractive alternatives to other public investments. For example, New York City plans to spend \$250 million on watershed protection for its drinking water supplies, avoiding the need to spend \$5 billion on a federally mandated water filtration system. (Footnote 4) Along the Mississippi River, acquisition of open spaces offers a much less costly alternative to expensive levee and diking systems.

3. Provide opportunities for American youth. There is a growing awareness of the importance of recreation and conservation programs as an important ally in the effort to stem the tide of gang violence, vandalism, teen pregnancy, unemployment and drug use. Many police chiefs, parole officers, elected officials and social workers are now outspoken in support for greater access to parks and open space opportunities. Recreation programs often provide much-needed role models, and conservation programs can help build self esteem. Participants learn to understand and ultimately provide positive leadership.

According to a recent *Washington Post* article, "By the year 2005, the number of young people between the ages of 15 and 19 will rise by almost 25 percent... The

consequences are profound. Records from the criminal justice system indicate that men between the ages of 18 - 24 are two to three times more likely to commit violent crime than men over age 25." (Footnote 5)

The cost of this teenage demographic bulge could be staggering. Today, according to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, it costs tax payers \$29,600 to keep one teenager in detention for a year. In 1993 this country spent \$2.3 billion incarcerating juveniles. (Footnote 6) By 2005, without new approaches, the costs will be out of control. Increasingly, the juvenile justice system is looking to recreation and conservation programs for cost effective actions.

In Fort Myers, Florida, juvenile arrests have dropped 28 percent since 1990, when the city began its STARS program (Success Through Academics and Recreational Support) for adolescents. In Phoenix, reports of juvenile crime dropped 55 percent when basketball courts and other recreation facilities and services were kept open until 2 a.m. (Footnote 7)

These and many other experiences suggest that we can and must develop a broad range of strategies to engage our youth in constructive behavior.

4. Increase the amount of natural habitat, forest lands, wetlands, cultural sites, and recreation lands we are preserving. An enhanced national network of parks and open space will benefit both our citizens and our natural and cultural resources. Overuse, fragmentation, and loss of natural areas has damaged our ability to enjoy the outdoors and has threatened many of our wildlife and plant resources. The continued loss of important recreation opportunities and the degradation of environmentally sensitive areas has created a deep sense of loss among many Americans. There is great frustration about our decreasing ability to experience natural settings, enjoy an abundance of wildlife, have access to unspoiled shoreline, or be enriched by a drive through a beautiful area.

Acre by acre, year by year, we are converting our treasured open spaces to urban and suburban uses. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's latest survey, the amount of developed land in this country increased by 14 million acres between 1982 and 1992. That new development was carved out of forests, farms, and range land.

The disappearance of open space can be seen in every corner of the country. According to the National Growth Management Leadership Project, in the New York metropolitan area, during the last twenty years population grew by 8 percent while the amount of urbanized land increased by 65 percent. In Seattle, population grew by 38 percent during the last twenty years, but the amount of urban area increased by 87 percent. In Denver, the projections for the next twenty years tell the same story. Population is expected to grow by 30 percent, while the amount of urbanized land will expand by 185 percent.

Predictably, the loss of habitats is having a devastating effect on animals and plants. The National Science Foundation estimates that the rate of extinction during the next several decades is likely to be 1,000 times the normal rate and will ultimately result in the loss of one-quarter or more of the species on earth. In California, the state lists nearly 300 species of plants and animals as endangered or threatened. The Center for Plant Conservation estimates that 133 plant species may disappear in California within the next ten years. The continued degradation of habitat across the country will undoubtedly lead to additional Endangered Species Act listings, complete with the attendant public contention and economic disruption.

At the same time, the demands on our existing system of parks and open spaces are exploding. According to the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America, public lands provide the setting for the vast majority of recreational opportunities. The U.S. Forest Service projects that growth in the demand for outdoor recreation will result in an additional 400 million recreation trips per year by the year 2040. We are already feeling the pinch from that growth in demand. Visits to our state and local parks have skyrocketed. According to the National Association of State Park Directors, during the five year period between 1987 - 1992, attendance at state parks across the country rose by more than 30 million annually, to a total in excess of 750 million visitors.

Improving our national network of recreation and conservation lands and waters will yield important benefits to help address the problems of land loss and overuse.

5. Build a system of parks and open space around the changing habits of the American people. Despite our nation's economic growth, the average working American lost 8 hours of discretionary time per week in the last decade. (Footnote 8) As a nation we are also increasingly committed to celebrating the human diversity among us - ethnicity, the abilities of the "disabled", the differing roles for men and women. The changes in lifestyle and demographics will place tremendous demand on close-to-home recreation and conservation resources. According to a 1993 report from the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America, "More and more people are forgoing the two-week, family vacation in favor of several shorter trips, closer to home. The availability of local recreation areas has become one of the key factors in determining participation in outdoor recreation."

Individuals are typically not concerned about who funds or manages a particular park or preserve, but they care deeply about whether it is secure, clean, convenient, accessible and affordable. Another benefit of a systematic development of a national network of parks and open space will be our ability to better respond to the changing perspectives and habits of the American people.

6. Rebuild existing facilities that are outdated and being forced to close. Low funding levels have significantly limited state and local governments' ability to improve existing park and recreation resources, open spaces, preserves or cultural sites. Many sites were acquired or developed in the 1950 - 1970 era. There is a tremendous need to

rebuild and renovate the existing system. Throughout the nation recreation facilities have been closed, or their value diminished because of a lack of maintenance or insufficient staff to operate programs.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has surveyed state and local governments to estimate their facilities and capital needs. Between 1990 - 1994 the NRPA estimated that state and local governments needed \$37 billion to catch up on their backlog of land acquisition, park development and rehabilitation needs. The budget constraints are affecting staff levels as well. In 1994, a Texas A&M survey found that nationwide the number of full time park and recreation employees was lower in 1990 than it was in 1978.

IV. PROBLEM STATEMENT - WHY WE CAN'T ACHIEVE OUR GOALS WITH THE EXISTING PROGRAMS

Why are we falling short? Why can't we achieve our vision with the existing LWCF and UPARR programs? The experience of the past decade provides the answers. The current LWCF and UPARR programs are not meeting our citizens' most urgent needs because financial resources have been insufficient, and the programs are not organized in a way to help us achieve our vision. The following is a list of some of the major shortcomings of the two programs.

1. There has been a lack of vision and leadership by national public officials regarding advocacy for park, recreation and open space issues. There is no clear vision or strategy about the enhancement of our nationwide network of recreation and conservation resources. There has not been an identifiable spokesperson who persuasively articulates the benefits of recreation and conservation activities from a social, economic and environmental perspective, and who recommends effective strategies to the President and Congress. There has been no champion to persuade decision makers that in partnership with our citizens, all levels of government, and private organizations, investments in parks and open space can help solve some of this nation's urgent social and environmental problems.
2. There is poor coordination between federal, state and local agencies, and among the federal agencies. Each of the three levels of government, plus the private non-profit sector, manages large portions of the current patchwork of our system of parks and open space. In the federal government, responsibilities for the management of lands and water that have significant open space and recreation value are split among five agencies: the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. A handful of other agencies, including the Departments of Justice, Transportation, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development, provide additional recreation and conservation opportunities. The lack of coordination results in disjointed programs, fragmented services, inconsistent policies regarding acquisition

and use, and a scattered constituency that does not strongly support new initiatives. Moreover, with few exceptions, none of the federal agencies has played a significant role in the delivery of urban recreation services.

3. Funding levels have been dramatically reduced. Shortly after the LWCF was created, Congress determined that revenue from offshore oil and gas leases would be the primary source of revenue for LWCF. In fact, in the mid-1970's, Congress authorized an appropriation of up to \$900 million per year for the LWCF. However, during the past decade, most of the revenue from offshore leases, which now totals about \$2.7 billion annually, has been dedicated to other purposes. Appropriations to the LWCF have averaged only \$250 million annually over the last ten years, most of it dedicated to the federal purchase of conservation lands. A ten-year average of only \$35 million a year has been available to all fifty states and thousands of local governments. (Footnote 9)

The experience with the UPARR program is similar. Congress initially planned on providing \$100 million per year for the UPARR program. Between 1985 - 1990 there were no funds available. In 1994, a mere \$5 million in UPARR funds was available to assist the nation's cities meet their recreation needs.

4. There is insufficient flexibility to allow communities to shape projects that will meet urgent local needs. Citizens in communities across the country are desperately searching for strategies to resolve a variety of important social, economic and environmental concerns. Despite the potential benefits LWCF and UPARR funds could bring to a broad range of issues, the regulations are perceived by many as too rigid to allow funds to meet compelling local and national challenges. Some portion of the funds should be used to stimulate innovation and alliances that respond quickly to changing economic patterns, emerging social trends, unanticipated threats to the environment, or shifting demographics.
5. The administration of the LWCF and UPARR programs does not provide sufficient support to meet our recreation and conservation needs. The responsibility for nationwide recreation policy and planning, and the administration of the LWCF and UPARR funds, has been severely diminished in the Department of the Interior's organizational structure. From the perspective of both advocates and elected officials there is a lack of visibility for the programs. As a result, there is a minimal appreciation on the part of the American public for the two funds, and a lack of understanding about how the programs can meet important national objectives. There is also a perception that the National Park Service (NPS) does not view the provision of recreation activities beyond national park system boundaries, or assistance to state and local governments, as a central part of their mission.

6. There is a splintered, ineffective constituency for the LWCF and UPARR programs. Support for recreation and conservation programs is too often viewed as an "either/or" proposition. Conservation and recreation programs are perceived to be competitors for the same limited funds, staff support, and policy direction. As a result, advocates for each seldom work together to find mutual interests. In addition, the lack of coordination among local, state federal and private programs means that advocates become isolated from one another, and parochial in their attitudes.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS - AN INITIATIVE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

More than thirty years ago, the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1963 provided the philosophical framework upon which the last generation's recreation and conservation programs have been built. It said that

"...all American people, of present and future generations, should be assured adequate outdoor recreation resources, and that it is desirable for all levels of government and private interests to take prompt and coordinated action... to conserve, develop, and utilize such resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people."

Those words are as meaningful today as they were thirty years ago. The principles embodied in that 1963 legislation begin to provide guidance for our work in leaving a legacy for our children - a legacy as strong and as lasting as the previous generation left for us.

However, the experience of the last thirty years has taught us that our task is complex. We have learned that our mission stretches well beyond those words written three decades ago. Recreation and conservation resources must now play a pivotal role in addressing some of this nation's most critical social and environmental issues.

To leave our lands and waters in better condition than we found them, and to address the challenges of today, not the challenges of 1963, it is time to change the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program.

An American Partnership for Recreation and Conservation

Our vision for an **American Network of Parks and Open Space** will require a departure from the ways in which the LWCF and UPARR funds have been used, managed and funded. **The Review Committee recommends that the LWCF and UPARR programs be combined into a single new program. We are also convinced that achieving our goal will require an annual federal commitment of \$1 billion dollars.**

The philosophy of the new program, the design of the supporting organizational structure, and the distribution of funds, should be based on the following principles:

1. Provide greater equity in the distribution of funds among local, state and federal agencies.
2. Reward agencies and programs which work together, creating partnerships among the different levels of government and the private sector.
3. Encourage more involvement of constituencies in the use, management and oversight of funds.
4. Provide greater flexibility in meeting local, state and national priorities.
5. Encourage citizen involvement in establishing local and state priorities and in planning improvements to the **American Network of Parks and Open Space**.

The funds from the combined LWCF and UPARR programs should be distributed based on the following formula. **It is also recommended that funding for the federal portion of the new program not drop below the level of LWCF funding for federal conservation programs, averaged over the last five years.**

- 30 percent to federal agencies.

Appropriations would be made directly to the federal agencies responsible for acquiring conservation lands and waters mandated by Congress. Up to 5 percent of these funds could be made available to reimburse states and others to purchase lands and interests in lands which are part of, or support the integrity of national systems (Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Trails System, for example), and which will be managed by states or other entities.

- 30 percent allocated to state governments.

Funds would be allocated directly to the states to enhance public recreation and conservation. Matching funds would be available (through the formulae described in current law) for the planning, acquisition, development and rehabilitation of land and water resources, including ecosystem, landscape and habitat preservation.

States would have the discretion to allocate funds to local or non-profit projects. Funds would be used by state and local agencies, and through them non-profit entities, to meet needs identified by a citizen-based public process. Incentives would reward states that maximize access to other federal programs or private resources to meet recreation and conservation needs. Funds would be available to a state upon approval of a statewide recreation and conservation resource plan, as presently provided.

- 30 percent allocated to urban areas.

Funds would be available to strengthen our nation's cities as a healthy, safe place to live. All urban areas would be able to participate. Funds would be awarded directly to large cities through a national competition (similar to the current UPARR

competition). Successful local requests for assistance would be expected to reveal collaboration with other public and private partners.

Grants would aid the planning and restoration of aging recreational facilities and the acquisition and restoration of urban open space lands. Innovative recreation services would continue to be eligible. The urban program would emphasize assistance to underserved populations. Existing UPARR and LWCF activities would be considered eligible expenditures.

- 10% reserved for national priorities, as designated by Congress.

Funds would be available on a competitive basis to meet Congressional criteria for national priorities. Funds would also be available for large scale, inter-jurisdictional projects that protect cross-boundary corridors, heritage areas or ecosystems. Local, state, federal and non-profit entities would be eligible to apply for national priorities funds.

Multi-year funding requests should be encouraged for large scale projects. While future appropriations cannot be guaranteed, state and local governments should be given the opportunity to acquire and develop projects over a three year period. State and local governments would continue to be required to provide matching resources, similar to the current LWCF and UPARR funds. This will allow the new program to leverage significant additional resources.

Building Partnerships - Program Integration

One of the keys to establishing an **American Network of Parks and Open Spaces** is the building of partnerships among the American people. Alliances must be forged between citizens and their government, among federal agencies, and with private entities, each of whom plays an important part in the stewardship of this remarkable array of recreation and conservation lands. A true collaborative effort is the only way we will build a consensus about the specific resources we want to enhance and preserve. It is also the only means through which we can manage complicated ecosystems, or share recreational resources.

To accomplish this vision the new program should encourage and support a simple, streamlined planning process. It should be flexible enough to utilize existing state and local planning efforts, but strong enough to insure extensive grassroots involvement and intergovernmental collaboration. Local, state and federal governments and non-profits should participate in the cooperative development of state recreation resource and open space plans, designed by state and local governments to meet general federal criteria. Participation in the statewide planning efforts should be encouraged before expenditures are made. Financial incentives should be provided to foster the highest degree of collaboration among citizens, the private sector, and all levels of government.

This is not an abstract notion. Successful alliances are being built in a handful of locations today. Their stories provide examples of how we can work together to create a national

network. In Ohio, local, county, state and federal agencies, private organizations and individual citizens are working together to develop the natural, cultural, recreational and economic resources of the Ohio & Erie Canal Corridor between Cleveland and Zoar, in northeast Ohio. The partners plan to develop an 87-mile trail along the canal towpath. Some of the partners include the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, the Ohio & Erie Canal Corridor Coalition, and Ohio Canal Corridor.

The Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, along Interstate 90, between Seattle and the crest of the Cascade Mountains, is another excellent example. It involves hundreds of volunteers, two counties, numerous cities, several large private timber companies, several state environmental agencies, state and federal highway departments, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Trust for Public Lands, a new local land trust, and The Nature Conservancy. The project is seeking to create a 12-mile wide swath of green along the state's most heavily traveled highway. The Greenway will build or sponsor trails, trailheads, a demonstration forest, link several state parks, offer environmental education sites, picnic and ballfield areas, biking and hiking routes, conservancy areas, and wetlands protection.

These types of cooperative efforts must become the rule, rather than the exception, in our new **American Network of Parks and Open Space**.

Non-profit Partners

Another feature of the **American Network of Parks and Open Space** should be the forging of strategic partnerships with non-profit organizations. Private non-profits have become valuable partners in helping governments and citizens acquire and manage land. Non-profits offer many advantages. They are often flexible and credible. Many have substantial skills in land acquisition, planning, and management. They can leverage public and private dollars by providing quick action, cost savings, volunteer labor, and matching funds. They can acquire land for subsequent conveyance to public agencies, or own and manage it themselves for public benefit. Successful partnerships between non-profits and government agencies have been built in every corner of the country.

The enhanced LWCF and UPARR program should encourage the continued development of these partnerships. Non-profits should be eligible to apply to any of the four categories of funds (urban, state, federal or national priorities) in partnership with the appropriate governmental agency.

Program Administration - A Focal Point is Needed

The management and organizational nurturing of the proposed program are as important as new resources. A national focal point is essential for this proposal to succeed. Without strong advocacy, skillful coalition building, dedication to a new vision, and stable staff support, the new program will wither and the **American Network of Parks and Open Space** will never be achieved.

Based on their performance during the past decade, neither the National Park Service nor the Department of the Interior has demonstrated the desire to provide that leadership. Although the National Park Service is perceived as the federal agency responsible for parks and recreation, its daily policy and management responsibilities are almost exclusively (perhaps necessarily) focused on the national park system.

In 1991, the National Park Service celebrated its 75th anniversary by hosting the Vail Symposium, in Colorado. The symposium brought together the National Park Service staff and leadership with colleagues and supporters from around the country to discuss the future of the National Park Service.

Among the conclusions reached at the conference was that Public Law 88-29, The Outdoor Recreation Act, already provides legislative mandates for the Secretary of the Interior to provide national leadership in recreation and conservation activities. The law mandates that the department produce, at five year intervals, a nationwide recreation plan, and that it provide technical assistance to state and local governments regarding outdoor recreation. The conference attendees recommended that if the department and the National Park Service do not "... provide the necessary leadership, these...functions should be transferred to other agencies. Certainly, to allow such functions to languish - due to either the lack of leadership or inadequate funding - is to ignore the public's interest that underlies the legislative mandates..."

The LWCF/UPARR Review Committee believes that the demands of managing the national parks system will continue to prevent the National Park Service from performing a leadership role on recreation and conservation issues or in fostering partnerships necessary to achieve an **American Network of Parks and Open Space**. The Review Committee believes that the Secretary of the Interior has the ability to accomplish this new vision using other resources within the department. However, the committee has seen little demonstration of interest by the department over the past several years.

Based on the track record, **the Review Committee recommends that a new Commission for Recreation and Conservation be created outside of the Department of Interior**. Should the department demonstrate renewed interest and capability to provide the necessary leadership, the new program could reside within Interior (but clearly external to the National Park Service).

The Commission for Recreation and Conservation would be a new governmental entity, providing a single-minded focus on creating an **American Network of Parks and Open Space**. It would be an organization similar in nature to the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. The Commission should be composed of prominent private citizens, representatives of state and local governments, members of Congress, the Secretary of Interior, and other federal officials as ex-officio members. The Commission should not incur new staff costs. It should be staffed by existing federal personnel.

The Commission should oversee the operation of the new program. Their duties should include:

1. Provide strong leadership in advocating for creation of an **American Network of Parks and Open Space**.
2. Foster citizen involvement and enhanced public outreach in local communities in the development of recreation and conservation policies.
3. Oversee intergovernmental grants administration, the disbursement of funds to local, state, federal and non-profit agencies, and monitor the progress of grant projects. (Funds for Federal agencies will be appropriated directly to those agencies by Congress.)
4. Make recommendations to Congress about the expenditure of funds for national priorities.
5. Serve as a focal point for the coordination of federal recreation and conservation policies and services delivered by multiple federal agencies. (Examples include the Department of Transportation's ISTEA program or federal land policies determined by the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management.)
6. Conduct selected planning functions, including approval of state recreation and conservation plans, and reports to Congress about recreation and conservation trends, needs and priorities.
7. Provide technical assistance to citizens, state and local governments, and non-profits. Work with interested parties to develop models for dispute resolution.
8. Provide effective administration without building a large bureaucracy.
9. Demonstrate an ability to leverage other resources.
10. Work in collaboration with citizens, state, local and federal agencies and non-profits to ensure a constantly improving program.

Program Funding

In order to achieve the goals set forth herein, it is essential that the Commission for Recreation and Conservation receive \$1 billion dollars annually. The Review Committee recognizes that achieving this level of funding will be difficult. The Budget Enforcement Act of 1990 and current revenue and expenditure limits have created a serious challenge to advocates of new or expanded programs. But this challenge must be pursued. The benefits are great, and the cost of inaction is frightening.

The first priority for securing additional funds should be the offshore oil and gas lease (OCS) revenues. The OCS revenues were identified by Congress as the primary source of income for the fund. The original philosophical basis for that linkage was strong in 1965, and it remains so today: Revenue from the extraction of natural resources should be used to protect another natural resource with long term public value - land. Congress initially authorized the LWCF fund to receive \$100 million per year. In 1987, Congress authorized payments into the fund of \$900 million a year until the year 2015. The revenue from offshore oil and gas leases is currently \$2.7 billion per year. The annual revenue is expected to remain at roughly the same level over the next five years. Given the anticipated level of OCS revenues for the next several years, and the fact that Congress has authorized an appropriation level of \$900 million per year for the LWCF, a large portion of funding for the new program should come from existing OCS revenues.

However, as additional fund sources are required, three principles should guide the search for new funds:

1. Users of the system should pay, in part, for its maintenance and operation.
2. Those activities and actions causing environmental degradation or negative impacts on parks and open spaces, should help pay for solutions.
3. Revenues generated by resources that belong to all of the American people should be returned to the public.

VI. CONCLUSION

Our Review Committee includes representatives of large urban park and recreation departments, state environmental, natural resources and parks organizations, the recreation industry, environmental groups and natural resource professionals. Together we have more than 100 years of experience in park, recreation and natural resource matters. We have participated in thousands of public meetings and visited countless parks, recreation centers and preserves. We have watched Americans use and enjoy public parks and open space in every season, situation and region.

Despite our varied backgrounds and diverse interests, we were able to reach consensus. We cannot express strongly enough that our national failure to invest and reinvest in parks, preserves and recreation programs is jeopardizing America's national heritage of scenic, natural and cultural places, is damaging the lives of our families, hampers economic growth, and is diminishing opportunities for our children, and their children to enjoy decent and productive lives.

With a new vision and creative leadership we can change this. We can foster the **American Network of Parks and Open Space** that is described in this paper. We urge this administration to take the steps that we have recommended to accomplish this. To do less would be a tragic denial of the needs of this and future generations.

FOOTNOTES

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