



NRPA CONGRESSIONAL VISIT TOOLKIT

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)
STATE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



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OVERVIEW

Inviting members of Congress to visit a LWCF State Assistance funded park or open space in their state or district is a powerful way to engage your elected officials and demonstrate the impact and value of parks and recreation. By witnessing the facilities firsthand, (while in-use, or at a ceremonial dedication) members of Congress can see the vital importance of these investments in their communities and the importance of the State Assistance Program.

The resources in this toolkit can help you prepare for the visit, craft a message and follow up – continuing your advocacy with your members of Congress after the visit.

If you have any questions about the resources here or need more information, contact the advocacy department at advocacy@nrpa.org.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

STEP ONE – INVITING A MEMBER OF CONGRESS TO VISIT YOUR LOCAL, LWCF STATE ASSISTANCE FUNDED FACILITY

- Call your member's congressional office in Washington, D.C., and ask for the Scheduler and Legislative Assistant for Interior's (or Parks & Recreation) name and email. The Legislative Assistant is the staff person that handles the LWCF and may help prioritize the visit for the congressional member. If you don't know your Representative's or Senator's D.C. phone number, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121, and ask to be connected.
- Once you have obtained the email addresses for the appropriate contact people, prepare your email invitation to them.
- Be sure to identify a specific date or a range of dates and times when you'd like to host the member of Congress for a tour (range of dates) and/or dedication (specific date and time). Include information about your agency and specific example(s) of locations which received LWCF State Assistance support and why it is important to visit. (See sample invitation).
- Email the invitation to the congressional office staff (scheduler and legislative assistant for Interior issues). Email is always the best means of corresponding with your members of Congress and their staff.

STEP TWO – FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with an email and/or phone call to confirm the elected official or a staff member is able to attend.
- Confirm the date, time and location.
- Make sure you know how much time you have with the Senator/Representative so you can plan and make the most of their visit.

STEP THREE – PREPARATION FOR THE VISIT

- Identify participants and speakers: staff, volunteers, youth, parents and any other community members.
- Identify any activities that you may want to have happen while the member of Congress is there for a visit. For example, engage the Senator/Representative in a ribbon cutting dedicating (or rededicating) a facility, show the place off while in use – a busy weekend demonstrating the popularity and value of the facility. Events with active, happy children are effective. Tours where the facility is not being utilized are NOT as effective. If there is ceremony – coin toss or ribbon cutting – have the Senator/Representative participate.
- Visit the site ahead of time – think about what the visitors will see and make any arrangements needed for the visit. Identify any photo opportunity locations. Arrange for a photographer and/or videographer to capture the event.
- Develop the agenda and confirm and brief speakers. Prepare talking points for the Senator/Representative and share them with the Legislative Assistant well in advance of the visit.

- Create informational packets about your agency, recreational programs and specifically, all facilities that have benefited from the LWCF State Assistance Program; as possible, include impact stories and data related to your facilities usage and how the LWCF State Assistance funding has/is making a measurable difference in the quality of the services you're providing the community.
- Arrange for any special requests that the Senator/Representative may need such as parking, security, etc. Be sure to ask the scheduler about this.

SUGGESTED MEDIA MATERIALS:

- Media advisory
- Program agenda with times
- Press release
- Map of the facility
- Second map highlighting all local facilities which have received LWCF State Assistance funding

STEP FOUR – PREPARE FOR AND ENGAGE MEDIA

- Ask the Congressional Office if it is ok to engage local media regarding the member visit. Coordinate with the Congressional Member's press staff on any media materials and outreach to media.
- Once approved, develop media materials for use with local outlets. If your agency or community has a local access television station, consider arranging for them to be onsite during the visit to capture and package TV footage which can be used for the community channels and/or as b-roll to your local news stations.
- Send out media advisory and news release with approval from all parties.

STEP FIVE – THE VISIT

- Make sure you pay close attention to time and stay on schedule.
- Welcome and introduce the Senator/Representative.
- Share why the facility is so important to your community.
- Share how LWCF State Assistance support has positively impacted/enhanced the development of the facility.
- Encourage the Senator/Representative and their staff to interact with the youth or participate in activities.
- Create good photo opportunities and take pictures, videos and capture any quotes or comments from the Senator/Representative during the visit. Make sure you have obtained photo/video release permission from the parents/guardians of participating children.
- Use social media to distribute visit updates in real-time to your community.

STEP SIX – POST VISIT

- Send out a press release recapping the visit and include any photos and quotes you are approved to release.
- Place photos and articles about the visit on your webpage and in your newsletter and/or email blasts.
- Use social media to publicize the event: Facebook/Twitter/Instagram.
- Follow up with NRPA public policy staff; we will help share the story of the visit.
- Send a thank you note to the Senator/Representative and staff via email.

CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH CHECKLIST

- ☐ **Invite sent to Congressional Members staff**
At least one month before you want the visit to take place

- ☐ **Follow up phone call to ensure the invite was received and reviewed by the scheduler**
Within one week of sending invite

- ☐ **Follow up to confirm the elected official or a staff member is able to attend**
Two weeks before visit

- ☐ **Follow up with your contact or the staff attending the event to ensure they are still attending**
One day before visit

- ☐ **Send a thank you note to staff**
Within one week of event

REMINDER:

The best way to correspond with your Senators/Representatives and their staff is via email.

SAMPLE CONGRESSIONAL INVITATIONS

SAMPLE INVITATION FOR THE LWCF STATE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

To: [Your Senator or Representative]

ATTN: [In-District Scheduler]

CC: [Interior LA]

FROM: [Your Name and City, State]

RE: [Park and Recreation Agency] [Facility Name] Dedication Event/Tour of [Facility Name]
Highlighting the Land and Water Conservation Fund

DATE: [Current Date]

Dear [Senator/Congressman/Congresswoman] [Name],

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program has an extensive history of making a big difference in the lives of [state's] families and sportsmen, and we would like to invite [member of Congress] to visit our [facility name] to see this in action. Based on the [member of Congress]'s travel schedule, we can work with your office to determine a date and time for the visit. {or... The [name of agency] is hosting a ribbon cutting/dedication/re-dedication event on [date and time] and would like to invite [member of Congress] to join us and participate in this public event. }

The LWCF was originally enacted in 1964 to help preserve, develop and ensure access to outdoor recreation facilities for the purpose of strengthening the health of U.S. citizens. It included a mandate to support the states in promoting close-to-home outdoor recreation through the State Assistance Program.

[Name of agency] has experienced the LWCF State Assistance Program's success, firsthand, with [\$XXX,XXX] in federal funding leveraged dollar-for-dollar with state and local resources to produce [XX] projects. This includes [facility name], as well as: [list names of two local/regional LWCF State Assistance projects, in addition to the facility where your event/tour is being held].

[Add one paragraph that provides background information on your organization or program-related facts/stats.]

The LWCF State Assistance Program is a tremendous example of partnership between federal, state and local governments to improve the lives of communities in every county of the country, and we hope we will have the opportunity to show this to you firsthand. Thank you for your service to our community and for your consideration of this invitation. If you have any questions you can contact me directly.

Sincerely,

[Name of agency Director or appropriate contact]

[Title]

[Email and phone number where they may reach you during the day]

SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

HOW TO PROMOTE THE LWCF STATE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- First, ALWAYS refer to it as the **LWCF State Assistance Program (or LWCF Stateside, for short)** – NOT simply, LWCF. It's State Assistance support which has helped make your projects happen. This is not to be confused with LWCF federal land acquisition – which makes up well over half of all LWCF programs.
- Know the process for how your state distributes its annual LWCF support. Some use an open, competitive process, while others use a formula based structure which designates a percentage of funding to specific communities or priorities.*
- Know as much as possible about the steps your agency/community took to receive its State Assistance support for the project you're highlighting at your event. Know the year and dollar amount of the LWCF State Assistance grant your community received in support of the project. Know the full history of LWCF Stateside support your community has received – years, dollar amounts, and projects.*
- Highlight that, by using LWCF State Assistance support the park/facility you are at will be preserved for public recreation in perpetuity – ensuring that future generations will continue to enjoy these public outdoor resources.
- Share that we all cherish our national treasures, but that many treasures (including the facility you're at) are NOT national parks. That, to the average [State-ian], the MOST important park is the one which is right down the street/they visit all the time. That's the type of place the State Assistance Program helps to create and enhance.
- Four-out-of-five Americans live in our larger communities, YET the State Assistance Program typically receives only about 13 percent of annual LWCF dollars. In fact, [State] is receiving only about [\$XXX,XXX] a year – which doesn't remotely address the unmet need for more safe and accessible places for people to recreate.
- This why [Senator/Representative's] support of not only reauthorizing the LWCF, but for an equitable and robustly funded STATE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM is so important.
- Add stories specific to your community relevant to the LWCF State Assistance facility/space.

*Make sure to tell your visiting member this information.

For specific LWCF State Assistance Program policy information, including historical data for your state, please visit:

www.nrpa.org/AdvocacyResources

<http://waso-lwcf.ncrc.nps.gov/public/index.cfm>

Once there, you'll find the most up-to-date advocacy materials in support of the LWCF State Assistance Program – talking points and samples (letters, op-ed, resolutions), as well as individual State data sheets.

SAMPLE MEDIA ALERT

Media Contact:

[Contact Name]

[Agency Name]

[Phone]

[Email]

[Agency Name] to Host [Senator/Representative Member Name] at [Park/Facility Name]

[Add a second-line description about why visiting/event program information]

WHO/WHAT:

[Name of major public officials who are participating, as well as the number of people who will be in attendance]

[List and briefly describe any programs or activities that will take place. Concentrate specifically on the highlights.]

WHEN:

[Date/Time]

[Be sure to mention individual start times for notable speakers/happenings]

WHERE:

[Location/Address]

[Provide parking information, if relevant.]

WHY:

[Provide an overview about the important role that federal support through the LWCF State Assistance Program has/is playing in providing quality economic, health and conservation opportunities to the local community]

For more information, go to [\[website\]](#).

EDITOR'S NOTE:

[Mention any opportunities for interesting visuals and tours. Provide onsite contact information.]

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

SAMPLE POSTS FOR TWITTER

- We're here with [\[@CongressmanJohnDoe\]](#) in [\[City\]](#) to talk about #LWCFSateside! @NRPA_News [\[INCLUDE PHOTO\]](#)
- Thank you [\[@CongressmanJohnDoe\]](#) for addressing the importance of local parks and #LWCFSateside [\[INCLUDE LINK TO OP-ED/NEWS RELEASE/STATEMENT FROM CONGRESSMAN\]](#) @NRPA_News
- Excited to have [\[@CongressmanJohnDoe\]](#) join us at our #LWCFSateside site at [\[TAG PARK AND REC DEPT HANDLE\]!](#) @NRPA_News [\[INCLUDE PHOTO\]](#)

IMMEDIATELY AFTER EVENT

- A big thank you to [\[@CongressmanJohnDoe\]](#) for joining us to talk about the importance of local parks #LWCFSateside! @NRPA_News [\[INCLUDE PHOTO\]](#)
- Thank you [\[@CongressmanJohnDoe\]](#) for supporting local parks and recreation for [\[STATEians\]!](#) #LWCFSateside @NRPA_News

TIP:

If you include
@NRPA_News we
will help spread
your story