

# Conservation Funding

*Because our native species predate the concept of ownership boundaries by millions of years, they are as likely to live on private lands as on public lands. With the vast majority of our Southern Appalachian Forests unprotected from pressing threats – such as suburban sprawl and development, expanding monoculture plantations and timber harvests – we must fund new easements and acquisitions that will secure our forest resources into the future.*

The Southern Appalachians now face the most significant land conservation opportunity since the turn of the twentieth century. Timber companies and other corporate landowners, along with individual property owners, are selling lands of great conservation and recreation value. There are two promising sources of federal funding that help protect these areas: the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Forest Legacy Program.

## **THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)**

The LWCF, established in 1964, is potentially one of the most valuable sources of funding to protect critical lands at risk. It has the potential to provide \$900



million a year to add to our public land base. The funds are mainly derived from royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling in U.S. coastal waters - the purpose of returning a tangible benefit to the American people in exchange for allowing publicly-owned resources to be used and depleted. The program is rarely funded at even half this level.

## **THE FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM**

Forest Legacy helps states purchase conservation easements that permanently protect land from development and can secure other benefits such as public access and a sustainable timber supply. Each year Congress must approve overall Forest Legacy funding, as well as specific funding for certain conservation projects. Owners retain their property, and receive tax breaks for entering into the program.

# Getting involved

The Interior Appropriations Subcommittee authorizes funding levels and though its “earmarking” process makes final project selections for both LWCF and Forest Legacy. Whether you are trying to shepherd a particular project through the process or want to advocate for higher funding levels, understanding the process is critical. Here is the schedule for a TYPICAL year – the dates can shift by weeks or months. SAFC sends out action alerts during the year to keep you updated about various opportunities to send in your comments and write or meet with your representatives.

## **February**

President’s Budget The Forest Service and other public land agencies recommend priority areas to the president. The president takes some of those recommendations and releases a budget containing the final list of priority projects.

## **Late April – Early May**

Member Testimony Day offers House members an opportunity to express support for a particular program. You will likely have better results convincing a member to include your request in their testimony if you have previously talked to your representative.

Written Public Testimony allows public comments to be submitted to each chamber’s subcommittee.

## **June**

Subcommittee Mark-up is when the subcommittee marks-up or pass the first version of the Interior Appropriations bill, including the “earmarked” projects to be funded. The Subcommittee must include your project for it to be considered.

## **July**

Committee Passage occurs about two weeks after the passage by the subcommittee. After full committee mark-up, the accompanying House or Senate committee will provide a list of projects for full house/senate approval.

House/Senate Passage happens after a debate by the full chamber. Amendments are often made here, but usually individual projects are not altered.

## **September-October**

Conference Committee Approval is the result of the House and Senate coming together to resolve the differences in their separate bills. This is the final hurdle, but the President does have veto authority over the final bill.

# Talking Points

- The Land and Water Conservation Fund is potentially one of the most valuable sources of funding to protect critical lands at risk. The funds are derived from royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling, the purpose of which is to return a tangible benefit to the American people.
- The federal LWCF needs to be fully funded, up to \$900 million, to adequately protect the unique resources of our country.
- The federal LWCF program needs to adequately address the thousands of small, yet critical inholdings that are offered for sale annually. At the very least, emergency inholding funding needs to be increased dramatically for each forest.
- The East and the Southern Appalachians need to receive its fair share of LWCF funds. There is a disparity between east and west, and although the majority of the US population lives in the eastern half of the nation, along with many threatened and endangered species, and more funds are usually appropriated to the West. The original intent of LWCF was to primarily fund acquisitions in the East.