



To Members of the Congressional Mississippi River Caucus,

The **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)** has delivered many benefits to America since it was first passed by Congress in 1964. As state legislators representing the Mississippi River region, these benefits have been especially evident in our states where the LWCF has invested over \$1.8 billion in the past 50 years. This funding has gone directly towards states' efforts to create, expand, and improve over 11,000 parks, refuges, historical sites, and recreational areas along the 10-state river corridor.¹ Therefore, it is vital that this program receive full dedicated funding to continue to protect and enhance these natural areas.

The primary mission of the LWCF is to provide public access for outdoor recreation, which is an important economic driver in the Mississippi River region. Estimates show that outdoor recreation brings in over \$130 billion in consumer spending to the region and has led to the creation of about 1.3 million jobs.²

However, this year's record high water in the Mississippi River and its tributaries have spotlighted the additional benefits provided by the Land and Water Conservation Fund aside from outdoor recreation. Many of the public lands projects funded by the LWCF in the Mississippi River Valley have lessened the impacts of 2019 flooding, functioning as natural flood infrastructure.

A good example of this can be seen in the string of National Wildlife Refuges located along the Mississippi River and its tributaries (including the Missouri and Ohio Rivers), which were inundated this year along with many state and local conservation areas and parks located in floodplains³. Natural flood infrastructure holds and conveys water that would otherwise impact homes and businesses, and acts as a safety valve to take pressure off levee systems during high water events. Expanding such areas through reconnection of floodplains to rivers, along with protection and restoration of wetlands, costs less than new built infrastructure and anticipates the more frequent high water events in the basin that climate models are forecasting.

Restoration of floodplains and wetlands can also help improve water quality, another critically important benefit in a river system like the Mississippi that carries high nutrient loads. Natural

¹ This figure represents a total for the state LWCF projects in Mississippi River States compiled through LWCF Coalition resources:

<https://www.lwcfcoalition.com/tools>.

² This figure represents a total for Mississippi River States compiled through LWCF Coalition resources:

<https://www.lwcfcoalition.com/tools>.

³ National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) in floodplains along the Mississippi River and its tributaries that have been funded and improved by the LWCF include the Upper Mississippi NWR (MN, IA, IL, WI); Middle Mississippi River NWR (IL, MO); Mark Twain NWR (IL, IA, MO); Chickasaw NWR (TN); Clarks River NWR (KY); Cache River NWR (AR); Dahomey and St. Catherine's Creek NWRs (MS); and Black Bayou, Cat Island, Red River, and Upper Ouachita NWRs (LA). Source: "State Specific Factsheets", Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition (<https://www.lwcfcoalition.com/tools>).

processing of nutrients in floodplains and wetlands helps protect drinking water sources along the river and fisheries downstream in the Gulf of Mexico.

The LWCF is therefore an important tool for expanding natural flood infrastructure and improving water quality in the Mississippi River Basin, and can function in concert with federal, state, and local programs also working to achieve these goals, such as the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), Farm Bill Conservation Programs, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, among others.

These important direct and collateral benefits from the LWCF in the Mississippi River Basin provide ample reason for supporting *full dedicated funding* for the program. Congress approved permanent reauthorization for the LWCF earlier this year with strong bipartisan support – we urge you to join together again to approve full dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Sincerely,

State Representative Rick Hansen
Minnesota

State Representative Marti Anderson
Iowa

State Representative Jeramey Anderson
Mississippi

State Senator Regina Barrow
Louisiana

State Representative Jamie Becker-Finn
Minnesota

State Senator Karla Bigham
Minnesota

State Representative Jill Billings
Wisconsin

State Senator Joe Bolkcom
Iowa

State Senator Robert Cowles
Wisconsin

State Representative Jim Davnie
Minnesota

State Senator Scott Dibble
Minnesota

State Senator Bill Dotzler
Iowa

State Representative Jamie Long
Minnesota

State Representative Mary Mascher
Iowa

State Representative Reginald Meeks
Kentucky

State Senator Mark Miller
Wisconsin

State Representative Nick Milroy
Wisconsin

State Representative Greta Neubauer
Wisconsin

State Senator Jerry Newton
Minnesota

State Representative Liz Olson
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State Representative John Persell
Minnesota

State Representative Dave Pinto
Minnesota

State Senator Janis Ringhand
Wisconsin

State Representative Melissa Sargent
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State Senator Chris Eaton
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State Representative Sara Feigenholtz
Illinois

State Senator Laura Fine
Illinois

State Representative Kelly Flood
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State Representative Mike Freiberg
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State Representative Robyn Gabel
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State Senator Eric Giddens
Iowa

State Senator Brenda Gilmore
Tennessee

State Representative Alice Hausman
Minnesota

State Senator John Hoffman
Minnesota

State Representative Abe Hudson
Mississippi

State Representative Chuck Isenhardt
Iowa

State Senator Scott Jensen
Minnesota

State Representative Bob Kressige
Iowa

State Representative Fue Lee
Minnesota

State Representative Duane Sauke
Minnesota

State Representative Jennifer Schultz
Minnesota

State Representative Katrina Shankland
Wisconsin

State Senator Erik Simonson
Minnesota

State Senator Jeff Smith
Wisconsin

State Representative Art Staed
Iowa

State Representative Sharon Steckman
Iowa

State Representative Cherlynn Stevenson
Kentucky

State Representative Shelia Stubbs
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State Representative Gary Tauchen
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State Representative Chris Taylor
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