

Please consider signing on to the letter below urging Senators Webb and Warner to become co-sponsors of S. 2747. It is critical that Virginia partners voice support for this effort now. Please respond by March 26th to Nikki Rovner of The Nature Conservancy (nrovner@tnc.org) and provide the name, title, and organization name as you would like it to appear on the letter.

The Honorable Mark R. Warner and Jim Webb
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators,

As organizations concerned with conserving Virginia's natural, recreational, and cultural resources and heritage, we are writing to share with you our strong support for full and dedicated funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). We appreciate your conservation leadership and urge you to join Senate Energy Chairman Bingaman as a co-sponsor of S. 2747, The Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act of 2009. This measure will finally ensure the necessary level of federal investment in parks, trails, wildlife refuges, forests, and historic landscapes in Virginia and across the nation.

As you know, the LWCF is America's most important tool for conserving national parks, forests, refuges, historic sites and other federal lands, and for supporting acquisition and development of state and local parks. From James River National Wildlife Refuge to Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Historic District to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail as well as support for the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Program, LWCF funding – with your support -- has helped acquire and protect some of Virginia's most unique public landscapes..

The LWCF state assistance program has supported state and community park acquisition and development across Virginia. From park protection at Lake Lawson in Virginia Beach, Wachapreague Seaside Park, and Shenandoah River State Park, to recreational facilities at Belle Isle State Park Environmental Center in Lancaster County, Upton Hill Regional Park in Arlington and Fairfax Counties, and the Field of Dreams Sports Complex in Craig County, LWCF grants have benefited over a thousand community parks, trails and recreation areas across Virginia.

The LWCF is a visionary and bipartisan program. Created by Congress in 1965, it is authorized to receive \$900 million annually in federal revenues from oil and gas leasing of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). It made good economic and

environmental sense in 1965, and it remains good sense today, to reinvest a small fraction of the federal leasing revenues in permanent natural resource protection.

Despite this decades-old promise, the LWCF program has been chronically under funded. It has received full funding only once in its history, and in recent years had steadily declined to a low in appropriated funding of \$138 million in 2007. Increases provided by Congress last year and in the Administration's FY11 budget recommendation provide a step in the right direction. However, full and dedicated funding is needed for the LWCF to fulfill its congressionally mandated purpose.

Virginia's natural resources make it a place where people want to live, as well as a premier vacation destination. Our communities enjoy innumerable benefits from proximity to protected parks, trails, refuges and other areas for hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, kayaking, camping, wildlife viewing, and relaxing on a beautiful beach on Virginia's coasts or inland waterways. A renewed investment in the LWCF and public land protection is crucial to ensure this legacy.

Increasingly, it is recognized that a healthy environment and abundant recreational opportunity not only promote human health and quality of life, but also are good for the economy. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2006 over 2.9 million people participated in hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching in Virginia contributing \$2.4 billion to the state economy. Conserving forests, watersheds, and wetlands has other significant social and economic benefits, among them ensuring clean, adequate, and affordable drinking water supplies for our communities. In addition, it's becoming more and more clear that conserving our forests, which currently store upwards of half the carbon emitted each year, is critical in the fight against climate change. And, whether it is a visit to a local park or an outing to a national wildlife refuge, getting outdoors connects families, promotes a healthy lifestyle, and builds community.

We appreciate your record of strong support for the LWCF program and urge you to become one of the co-sponsors of this historic conservation measure. S. 2747 will finally fulfill the promise made decades ago for a source of consistent federal investment in parks, trails, open spaces, and historic and cultural resources in Virginia and across the nation.

Sincerely,