

Vet Voice Foundation Land & Water Conservation Fund Position Paper



AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, MONUMENTS, WILDLIFE AREAS, AND OTHER PUBLIC LANDS ARE PART OF OUR COUNTRY'S OUTDOOR HERITAGE. Veterans share a strong connection with the outdoors and believe that protecting our national public lands is a patriotic duty.

The Vet Voice Foundation supports policies that protect current public lands and conserve new ones through programs such as the **LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)**, which protects national parks and forests and provides grant funding for local community projects.

LWCF IS AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR:

- Upholding family outdoor traditions.
- Improving access to public land.
- Protecting historic battlefields and America's heritage.
- Fostering recreation and recovery in the outdoors.
- Creating places for kids to be more active.

THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND (LWCF)

Created by Congress in 1965, LWCF plays an important role in protecting some of our country's most valuable public lands, such as Chattahoochee River NRA, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, Mount Rainier National Park and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

State and local governments across the United States used LWCF matching grants to build or renovate playgrounds, trails, parks, swimming pools, urban bike paths, soccer fields, baseball fields and other facilities. LWCF funding has supported more than 41,000 local projects over the last 50 years, including sites that honor veterans.

LWCF gets its money from annual royalties paid by energy companies drilling for oil and gas offshore – not taxpayer dollars. However, despite bipartisan support for LWCF, Congress diverts much of this funding to other purposes almost every year.

Unfortunately, in 2015, Congress allowed LWCF to expire. After huge public backlash, Congress voted to extend the fund for three more years. It will cease to exist at the end of September 2018 unless Congress votes to bring it back.

CONGRESS MUST ACT NOW TO SAVE LWCF

The Vet Voice Foundation is calling on members of Congress to permanently reauthorize and fully fund LWCF.

“Reauthorizing LWCF is absolutely critical to protecting the lands we love.”

– GARETT REPPENHAGEN, IRAQ WAR VETERAN

“Through LWCF, our country made a commitment to safeguard our natural areas and provide recreation opportunities to all Americans. We need to honor that commitment by bringing back LWCF and fully funding it each year.”

– PAUL D. EATON, MAJOR GENERAL, U.S. ARMY (RETIRED)

LWCF: A Tool for Upholding Family Traditions

Many veterans value family traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Research shows that [veterans](#)¹ are more than twice as likely as the general public to say they have a son or daughter who has served in the military. Pentagon [research](#)² on 2012-2013 military recruits found that more than 25 percent had a parent who served in the military and 80 percent had at least one parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, sibling or cousin who also served .

These family traditions are not just limited to military service. Many veterans and their families have passed down a love for the outdoors from generation to generation. For years, they have taken their families to national parks on vacation, shared fishing trips and gone camping in forests and along rivers.

Places such as Acadia National Park (Maine), Custer State Park (South Dakota), Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (Oregon and Washington), Eagle Nest Lake State Park (New Mexico), Grand Teton National Park (Wyoming), and Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (Colorado) give veterans and their families a place to access the outdoors now and to continue to share these family traditions with future generations.

LWCF is a tool that helps protect and enhance the places that allow veterans – and all Americans – to continue these family traditions.

“Coming home to Colorado from deployment in Panama, my heart soared to experience the same natural splendor my pioneering family had enjoyed more than 100 years before. I often think back to them and the work they did running a mule train in Clear Creek County, as they supplied the miners and prospectors who helped build this great state of ours. My hope is that future generations will be able to enjoy the same rugged beauty we did then and still do today.”

– MIKE MARION, US ARMY, PANAMA VETERAN



Charlie Eadie, U.S. Army Veteran, with his wife Jame Eadie and kids at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park

“We love to get outdoors - it’s good for the soul to get outside and explore. Growing up in Santa Cruz, California, I had the beautiful Pacific Ocean and epic waves to ride at Steamer’s Lane, and we hiked and camped in the Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park. My wife and I love to bring our kids to visit these places, and after serving overseas in the military, I gained a special appreciation for not only our freedoms, but our priorities as a country.

I treasure the fact that we protect our National Parks and resources so that I can share the experience with my kids and they can do the same.”

– CHARLIE EADIE, U.S. ARMY VETERAN

¹ <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/11/23/the-military-civilian-gap-fewer-family-connections/>

² <http://time.com/4254696/military-family-business/>

LWCF: A Tool for Improving Access to Public Land

MANY VETERANS ENJOY HUNTING AND FISHING IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS AND ARE VOCAL PROPONENTS FOR THE NEED FOR GREATER ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS IN ORDER TO PURSUE THESE ACTIVITIES.

LWCF has been a critical tool for securing and increasing sportsmen's access to public lands.

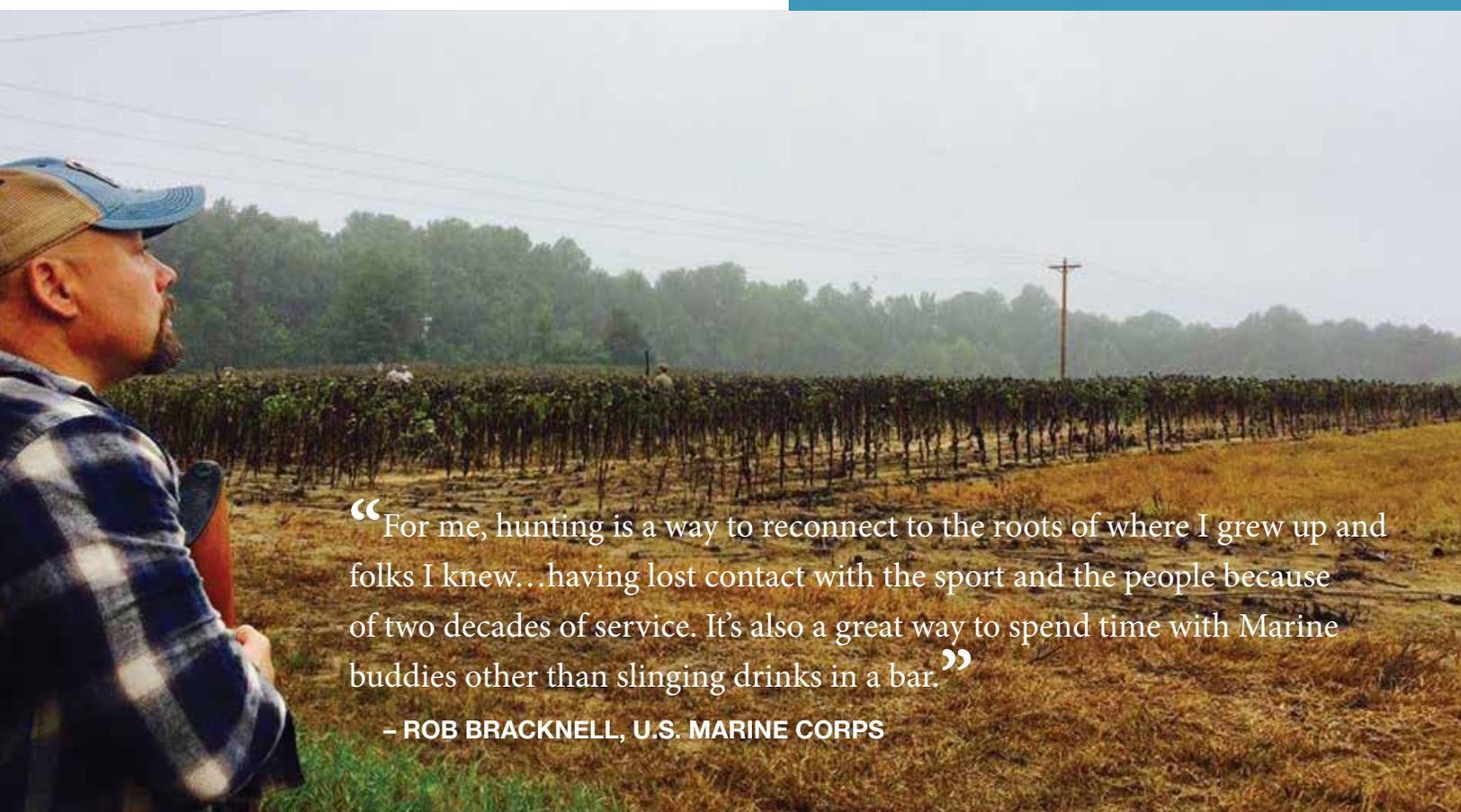
It has been used to increase access for hunting and fishing in places such as Cross Mountain Canyon Ranch (Colorado), Big Rivers Wildlife Management Area (Kentucky), Craig Thomas Little Mountain Special Management Area (Wyoming), the Smith River (Montana), the High Divide (Montana and Idaho) and Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge (Iowa).

“We must keep the places we love to hunt and fish in good condition, so that our kids and future generations of vets will have the same opportunities to enjoy them that we have today.”

– MAJOR GENERAL DONALD EDWARDS,
U.S. ARMY (RETIRED)

“Many veterans have a natural love of the outdoors. We fish, hunt, hike and otherwise enjoy our public lands with friends and family members.”

– JON SOLTZ, SERVED IN THE ARMY IN KOSOVO
AND IRAQ



“For me, hunting is a way to reconnect to the roots of where I grew up and folks I knew. . .having lost contact with the sport and the people because of two decades of service. It's also a great way to spend time with Marine buddies other than slinging drinks in a bar.”

– ROB BRACKNELL, U.S. MARINE CORPS

LWCF: A Tool for Protecting Historic Battlefields and America's Heritage

VETERANS UNDERSTAND THAT IT IS CRITICAL TO PROTECT AREAS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE TO OUR COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY THE BATTLEFIELDS THAT ARE PART OF OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE AND TELL THE STORY OF OUR COUNTRY. We need to remember and honor the brave men and women who fought for our country and ensure that our children have a connection to our history.

LWCF is a critical tool for preserving America's military heritage and monuments to those who sacrificed for their country. It has been used to protect places such as Manassas National Battlefield Park, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, Valley Forge Historic Park and Gettysburg National Military Park.

“Battlefields, like ancient amber, are windows into the past. They remind us of the courage of our military, both the folly and the wisdom of our national goals and the sacrifice of those who have gone before us. If we fail to remember why we fought in the past we will almost assuredly repeat our errors in the future.”

– MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL R. LEHNERT,
U.S. MARINE CORPS (RETIRED)

“The creation of the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument finally paid tribute to contributions of Colonel Charles Young, the highest ranking African-American commanding officer in the United States Army from 1894 until 1922, and the first African-American superintendent of a national park. We need to continue to honor the many diverse military heroes that have served our country.”

– STEVE DUNWOODY, U.S. AIR FORCE VETERAN



Stu Huffman, U.S. Air Force

FLIGHT 93 NATIONAL MEMORIAL (PENNSYLVANIA)

On September 11, 2001, after attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the passengers of United Flight 93 made the heroic decision to fight back against the terrorists that had taken over their plane. They fought for control of the plane, which crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. LWCF contributed \$10 million to protect the “Field of Honor” and the Flight 93 National Memorial to honor the brave heroes of Flight 93.

LWCF AND VETERANS

LWCF grants have been used to support³ projects that honor veterans in states across the country, including:

- Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park (Buffalo, NY)
- Worland Veterans Park (Washakie, WY)
- Veterans Memorial (Seminole, FL)
- War Memorial Park (Bristol, VA)
- Veterans' Park (Denver, CO)
- Aberdeen Veterans/Holgate Parks (Brown, SD)
- Veteran's Park (San Juan, NM)
- Veterans Memorial State Forest (Benzie, MI)
- Veterans Memorial Park (La Crosse, WI)

³ <http://www.invw.org/2012/06/11/lwcf-grants-database-1283/>

LWCF: A Tool for Fostering Recreation and Recovery

OUR PUBLIC LANDS PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATION AND RECOVERY FOR VETERANS. Like so many Americans, veterans count on our national public lands for fishing, hiking, camping and hunting. Some veterans turn to the outdoors to heal from the trauma of war and renew bonds with friends and family members after long deployments. Protecting these lands is one way that America can give back to its heroes who have paid such a high price for our freedom.

LWCF is a critical tool for creating and protecting places where veterans can connect with nature to find peace and reduce stress.

“There’s something wonderful about the places that few others have visited. When I keep going past where the trail ends, that’s when I feel most at peace.”

– STU HUFFMAN, U.S. AIR FORCE

“Being able to get lost in the mountains of Montana allowed me to find myself and keep me mentally grounded after returning home from service.”

– JOSH WERKHEISER, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST
PARATROOPER, 3/509 AIRBORNE INFANTRY

“After returning to my family home in the shadow of Pikes Peak, I instinctively retreated to the outdoors to self-reflect on my experience in Iraq as a sniper in the Sunni Triangle. Without the solace and serenity of our public lands I never would have survived the transition.”

– GARETT REPPENHAGEN, CAVALRY SCOUT/SNIPER,
US ARMY 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION



SD Goode exploring the Grand Canyon

“For me this trip to Grand Canyon National Park came after two deployments to Iraq. I had just had children and things were changing fast. Exploring our nation’s parks gave me and my husband (also a veteran) an opportunity to heal, re-center ourselves, and appreciate that while the World around us was moving fast, that canyon I walked through for 8 miles was not.”

– SD GOODE, U.S. ARMY AND IRAQ WAR VETERAN

“When I’m inside a building, the walls block the rest of the world and my mind can take over, filling the unknown outside world with any random anxiety ridden scenario that a brain can make up. Yet, when I’m outside, and I can see the giant blue sky, and the amazing shapes and colors of this incredible planet we are blessed to call home...I know that everything is going to be okay. In fact, it is better than okay. It’s suddenly the best moment of my life.”

– ROBERT KUGLER, UNITED STATES MARINE
RESERVE, IRAQ VETERAN

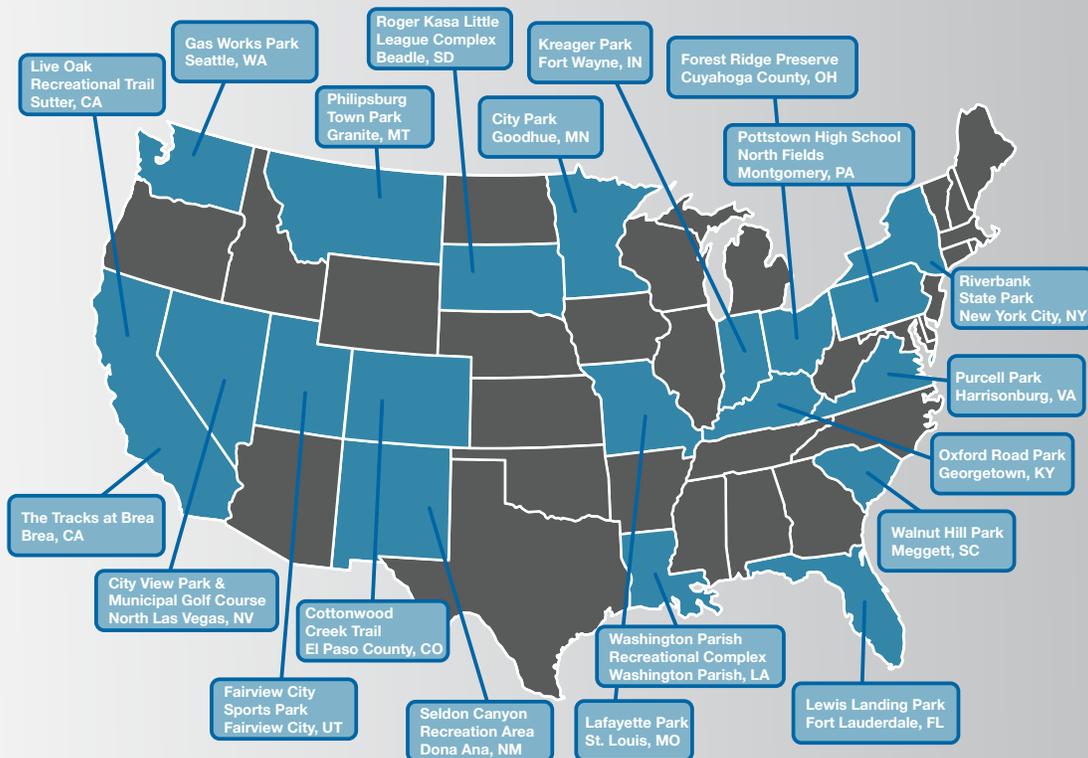
LWCF: A Tool for Creating Places for Kids to be More Active

TOO MANY OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN STAY INSIDE WATCHING TV, PLAYING VIDEO GAMES OR SPENDING TIME ONLINE – INSTEAD OF ENJOYING THE OUTDOORS. More than a quarter of young Americans are too overweight to serve in our armed forces. Veterans join active military leaders in urging greater attention to the need for American families to be more active and public lands are a cost-effective place to make that happen.

LWCF is an important tool for creating places where kids can be more active because it helps build and renovate parks and playgrounds, bike paths, sports fields, swimming pools and other recreation facilities. People in almost every county in the U.S. have benefitted from LWCF grants.

A 2010 study by the nonprofit organization Mission: Readiness found that 27 percent of all young adults “are too fat to serve in the military.” The report calls this trend “a threat to national security” and notes that “being overweight is now by far the leading medical reason for rejection.” Public lands provide important, cost-effective opportunities for young people to get outside and be active.

All of these Parks – and Many More – Have Gotten LWCF Funds



Examples of Parks Taken From National Park Service LWCF Stateside [Annual Reports](#)⁴.

⁴ <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/annual-reports.htm>

LWCF: CONGRESS MUST ACT NOW

The Vet Voice Foundation is calling on members of Congress to permanently reauthorize and fully fund LWCF.

Letter signed by over 8,000 veterans in support of LWCF.

“From protecting wildlife habitat, natural resource lands, outdoor recreation opportunities, and working forests at the local, state and federal levels, to expanding hunting and fishing access, the LWCF and Forest Legacy conserve important lands for current and future generations.”

**– LETTER SIGNED BY U.S. SENATORS
JEANNE SHAHEEN (D-NH),
RICHARD BURR (R-NC),
SUSAN COLLINS (R-ME),
JON TESTER (D-MT),
CORY GARDNER (R-CO) AND
MICHAEL BENNET (D-CO)**



Dear Senator,

Gettysburg, The 9/11 Memorial. These iconic sites are funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund, one of the nation's most successful conservation programs. Unless Congress acts, the LWCF will expire this September, eliminating funding that protects American military heritage.

For more than 50 years, the LWCF has provided critical grants that protect and enhance national treasures like American battlefields, our national parks and forests, and over 40,000 state and local park projects across the country.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund, America's most important conservation and recreation program, a program that has saved places in nearly every state and county in the United States, will expire this September 30 unless Congress moves to renew and fund. For fifty-two years, this fund, at no taxpayer cost (funded by offshore oil and gas royalties to the federal government), has improved the lives of countless Americans and foreign tourists - all of whom generate considerable profits in the surrounding communities where the LWCF has created value.

The LWCF exists because of Teddy Roosevelt's vision to start protecting our recreational opportunities, Dwight D. Eisenhower's instinct for conservation action, John F. Kennedy's commitment to the outdoors, and Lyndon B. Johnson's creation of LWCF that we as American's now have the most extensive network of open spaces in the world to hunt, fish, hike, swim and play.

By allowing the LWCF to expire, Congress is jeopardizing the preservation of American military heritage and the monuments to those who sacrificed. Congress should immediately fund and reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund at its full amount to ensure beneficial investment in management of America's battlefields, monuments, and all public lands.

Sincerely,

TEAM VET VOICE FOUNDATION

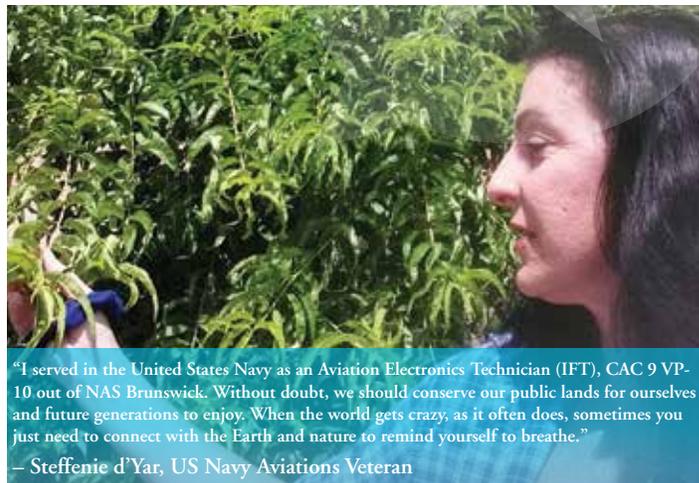
Rob Kugler, United States Marine Reserve, Iraq veteran and his dog



Snapshots of Veterans in support of LWCF



Garrett Reppenhagen, Cavalry Scout/Sniper,
US Army 1st Infantry Division



"I served in the United States Navy as an Aviation Electronics Technician (IFT), CAC 9 VP-10 out of NAS Brunswick. Without doubt, we should conserve our public lands for ourselves and future generations to enjoy. When the world gets crazy, as it often does, sometimes you just need to connect with the Earth and nature to remind yourself to breathe."
— Steffenie d'Yar, US Navy Aviations Veteran



Mike Marion, US Army, Panama Veteran



Josh Werkheiser, Communications Specialist Paratrooper,
3/509 Airborne Infantry



About the Vet Voice Foundation

Founded in 2009, the mission of Vet Voice Foundation (VVF) is to mobilize veterans to become leaders in our nation's democracy through participation in the civic and democratic process. VVF seeks to harness the energy and drive of the dedicated men and women who have fought for their country, and put it to work at home and in their communities on the important issues they face, such as health care, jobs, the environment, and housing.

Vet Voice Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan organization, organized under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, for charitable and educational purposes.

For more information, please visit www.vetvoicefoundation.org or contact Paul Eaton at peaton@vetvoicefoundation.org.