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**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

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October 8, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
Chairman  
Committee on Natural Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On October 7<sup>th</sup> you wrote Secretaries Jewell and Vilsack demanding answers to dozens of questions regarding thousands of land transactions carried out over 50 years under the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act. The content of these questions demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the Act, the level of detail betrays a desire to obstruct reauthorization rather than facilitate it, and the tone of the letter evidences hostility to the program's bipartisan and popular goals. We write to provide information sufficient to move forward with reauthorizing LWCF, if that is your goal.

According to an excellent report prepared by the *Congressional Research Service* (RL33531), last updated in June and available online, a total of \$37.1 billion has been credited to the LWCF. Congress has appropriated \$17.1 billion of that for purposes of the Act, of which 61% has been for federal land acquisition. If our math is correct, \$10.37 billion has been spent on federal land acquisition over the 50-year life of the program, or an average of roughly \$200 million a year.

Beyond these totals, your letter requires detailed information regarding each individual purchase. This is an unusual request given that each purchase was first approved by Congress before being carried out by the relevant agency. This is like an employer asking an employee how much she has been paid. Perhaps a review of bills making appropriations for the Department of the Interior for the last 50 years would be a more appropriate method for gathering this data.

Your letter argues that, "land management agencies are focusing almost solely on new acquisitions," while other aspects of their responsibilities are "languishing." A quick review of the FY 2015 budget requests for the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service reveals that those agencies' requests for federal land acquisition account for 1.8%, 1.9%, 2.8% and .8%, respectively, of their overall budget requests. Given these percentages, this concern is unfounded.

Your letter repeats a frequent allegation that the federal government “generally does not know what it owns.” This is presented as an argument against future acquisitions. We would refer you to another excellent publication, this one from the Bureau of Land Management, called *Public Land Statistics*, updated for 2014, and also available online. A quick review of this publication reveals that the federal government maintains quite a detailed accounting of federal lands and that, while Republicans claim the federal government owns too much land, the historic trend has been one of divestiture and fragmentation, leading to the so-called “checkerboard” pattern we see in western states. As recently as the late 1860’s, the federal government owned 1.8 billion of the 2.3 billion acres in the contiguous United States. Grants to states, homesteaders, land-grant colleges, railroads, and others settling Alaska and the West, reduced federal land ownership to roughly 640 million, often fragmented, acres today.

This fragmented ownership is indeed a significant management challenge as it places public lands – as much as four million acres by some estimates -- off-limits to the public because they are surrounded by non-federal lands. LWCF funding, which is targeted at acquiring in-holdings, is the only program dedicated to addressing this problem.

The letter also asks whether projects to control wildfire risks have been carried out on acquired federal lands. The answer is likely no. Climate change has created a fire season that is 78 days longer than it was 1970. As a result, the cost of fire suppression has increased dramatically and now accounts for over fifty percent of the Forest Service budget. Twenty years ago it was only 16% of the budget, but for more than a decade, Congress has denied the Forest Service and other agencies adequate funding to address wildfire prevention; what little prevention funding has been appropriated has been “borrowed” to fight active fires. The implication that LWCF in some way contributes to increased fire danger, when the real cause is Congress’ skewed budget priorities and denial of climate change, is disingenuous.

You also ask for information regarding federal land acquired for recreational purposes; we are happy to supply relevant figures. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation, including hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, and similar activities, contributes nearly \$650 billion annually to the U.S. economy and support more than 6 million jobs.

Much of this activity occurs on federal lands. According to the U.S. Department of Interior’s *Economic Report for Fiscal Year 2014*, national parks, national wildlife refuges, national monuments and other public lands received 423 million recreational visitors in 2014 – an increase of 407 million from 2013. These visits contribute \$42 billion to the national economy and support about 375,000 jobs. The report and user-friendly visualization tools are available online. With ever-increasing development pressures on non-federal lands, public recreation depends on LWCF more than ever.

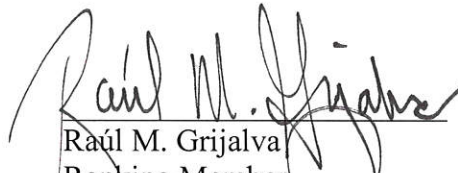
Finally, your letter seeks information regarding the process for identifying and prioritizing federal land acquisitions or easements. Acquisition of land, or interests in land, is an integral part of the on-going planning process for all federal land management agencies. As a result, each acquisition proposal is developed over years, if not decades, with extensive review by the public, and at every level of the Administration. And as mentioned earlier, each and every acquisition is then approved by the Congress. Any Member who finds these acquisitions perplexing should discuss these concerns internally with our colleagues, rather than questioning the Administration.

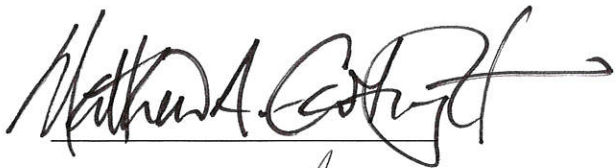
It is unfortunate that your letter ignores the state-side LWCF program. In an attempt to provide a full picture of the program, we will answer the question you failed to ask. Through 2013, LWCF has funded more than 42,000 formula, matching, grants to states, totaling \$4.25 billion, for outdoor recreation projects. Virtually every county in the country has recreation space funded through LWCF.

It is striking that you have not seen fit to issue similar letters seeking the number of abandoned mine sites across the West or the number of idle leases being stockpiled by oil companies or the number of acres subject to trespass grazing. The Land and Water Conservation Fund needs reauthorizing, not investigating. If the lack of information described in your letter was an impediment to consideration of H.R. 1814, legislation to reauthorize LWCF which currently has 181 bipartisan cosponsors, this response should remove that obstacle.

We stand ready to work with you and the other Members of the Committee to reauthorize this popular, effective, bipartisan program immediately.

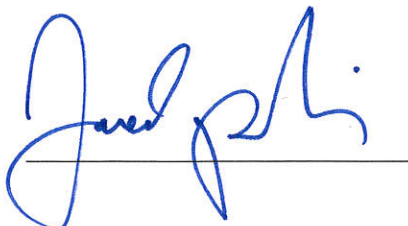
Sincerely,

  
Raúl M. Grijalva  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Natural Resources

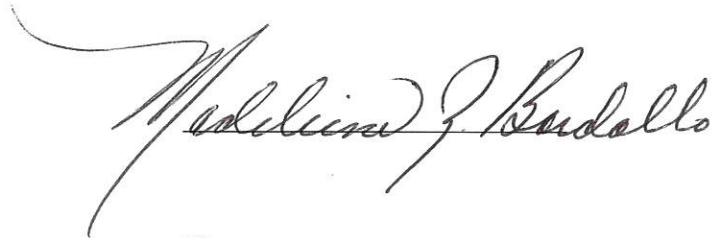




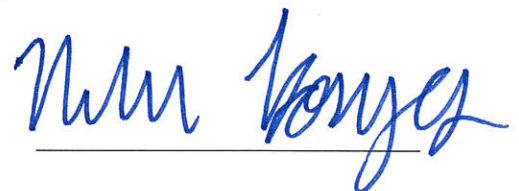












Luis Capps