

MCHENRY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
RESOLUTION #20-25

SUPPORTING THE MCHENRY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S  
FY 2021 LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

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**WHEREAS**, the McHenry County Conservation District (hereinafter referred to as the "District"), is a conservation district organized and existing under the laws of the State of Illinois (70 ILCS 410); and

**WHEREAS**, the District as a unit of local government could be impacted by decisions made at the state and federal level, and

**WHEREAS**, the identification of executive, legislative or administrative action issues that the District will support or oppose is important; and

**WHEREAS**, for this reason, the District established Administrative Policy #2.05.12 in September 2006 to ensure public policy matters of interest to the District can be addressed by the Board of Trustees, Executive Director or his/her designee; and

**WHEREAS**, the proposed FY 2021 Legislative Program included as Exhibit A highlights the legislative/public policy objectives and specific issues of interest to the District and other likeminded organizations at the state and federal level; and

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, by the Board of Trustees of the District that it is necessary, desirable, and in the best interest of the District, its Board of Trustees, Executive Director or his/her designee to advocate for the legislation proposed in the FY 2021 Legislative Program.

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, this Resolution #20-25 has been executed this 24<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2020, by the President and attested by the Secretary of the Board of Trustees of the District.

Ayes:   7  

Nays:   0  

Absent:   0  

Abstain:   0  

*Vernon M Scacci*  
Vernon M Scacci (Mar 27, 2020)


**VERN SCACCI, PRESIDENT  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

*Carolyn Campbell*  
Carolyn Campbell (Mar 27, 2020)

**CAROLYN CAMPBELL, SECRETARY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**



TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Elizabeth S. Kessler, Executive Director  


DATE: March 24, 2020

RE: FY 2021 Legislative Program  
Resolution #20-25

#### LEGISLATIVE/PUBLIC POLICY OBJECTIVES

- Oppose unfunded mandates that increase the District's operational and administrative costs.
- Limit exposure to additional liability or legal costs.
- Maintain or enhance current grant funding sources and budgets for state and federal agencies that assist in fulfilling the District's mission.
- Support local, state and federal policies that promote conservation, sustainability, and stewardship of our natural and cultural resources.
- Protect wild places and promote the protection of endangered, threatened and protected species, clean air and clean water.
- Support the management of public lands through science that support thriving native plant and animal populations in a safe, respectful and sustainable manner.
- Protect the District's current statutory authority.
- Promote legislation that benefits conservation districts, forest preserve districts and park districts.
- Promote the health, wellness and safety of Conservation District visitors, volunteers, trustees, and employees through spaces, places, programs, and opportunities for physical activity and nutrition.
- Connect children to nature.
- Strengthen well-rounded environmental education programs through experiential learning.

- Support and protect the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund as a secure and well-funded pension system for public employees of park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts, recreation agencies and special recreation associations.
- Develop appropriate new local, state and federal partnerships and funding sources to meet the needs of McHenry County residents.

## STATE LEGISLATIVE ISSUES OF INTEREST

- Invest in State-wide Capital Program: Park and Recreational Facility Construction and Illinois Museum Capital Grant Programs  
The National Recreation Park Association released a new report (March 8, 2018) which demonstrates the vast economic impact of our nation's local parks. According to the report, local parks generated more than \$154 billion in U.S. economic activity and supported more than 1.1 million jobs in 2015 from their operations and capital spending alone. Illinois ranks as the second highest impact at \$10.6 billion, with California at \$15.9 billion.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Illinois Environmental Council, "Illinois was at the forefront of the state park movement, but has since fallen behind most of the nation with regards to both open space available to its citizens and conserved for future generations." Investments in a capital program will enhance parks and preserves, benefit wildlife habitat, expand recreational opportunities and generate substantial economic return on investment in Illinois communities.

According to the Illinois Environmental Council and Sierra Club Illinois Chapter:

- Nationally, Illinois ranks at the bottom nationally in dollars spent per capita on land conservation. Iowa, Wisconsin and Ohio increased their investment in conservation in recent years, but state spending in Illinois has decreased.
- Open space in Illinois is vanishing at an alarming rate, threatening our proud outdoor heritage and the ability of current residents and future generations to enjoy the natural beauty of our prairie state.
- State programs such as Open Lands Trust (OLT) and Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) leverage millions from federal, local, private and non-profit sources.
- Illinois voters consistently demonstrate support for investment in parks and conservation, approving nearly 50 ballot measures between 1998 and 2018. A 2013 survey of Illinois residents found that 60 percent supported paying more in property taxes to acquire open space and trails.
- According to a national survey, an overwhelming majority of voters believe we can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time.

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<sup>1</sup> National Recreation Park Association. Retrieved March 9, 2018 from <http://nrpa.org/ParkEconReport>.

The Illinois Museum Capital Grant Program provides funding assistance to public museums in Illinois to improve museum facilities and develop new exhibits and assists agencies in meeting their educational and public outreach missions.

Action: Support the appropriation of funding of additional funding through a new statewide capital construction program for the Park and Recreational Facility Construction (PARC) Grant Program and for the Public Museum Capital Grants Program.

- Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Fund (OSLAD) and Natural Area Acquisition Fund (NAAF)  
Appropriations - Department of Natural Resources

Illinois primarily funds land preservation through two state programs: the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF) and Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Fund (OSLAD). NAAF provides funds for land protection of woods, prairies and wetlands as well as maintenance activities and stewardship projects. OSLAD provides matching grant funds to local governments for up to half the costs of projects that create outdoor opportunities. The McHenry County Conservation District has leveraged locally approved funds to apply for OSLAD and NAAF grants for land preservation, trails and other public access improvements.

Both NAAF and OSLAD are funded through dedicated revenue from the state real estate transfer tax, a \$1 tax for every \$1,000 in real estate sales. Grant funding has been received for projects such as Fitzgerald, Rothschild, Wold, Kishwaukee Headwaters, Sobel, Compere, Tristano, Kattner, and McConnell Woods/Dufield. Funding for NAAF and OSLAD has been diminished through fund raids or not fully allocating funds during budget crises. The raids and sweeps impact the ability to protect vulnerable open spaces and provide recreational opportunities for residents.

A study by the Trust for Public Land found that for every \$1 dollar invested in open space protection there is a \$6 return in economic benefits.

Action: Support full funding of the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Fund (OSLAD) and Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF).

- Other Grants  
Support other funding sources that have the purpose of assisting the McHenry County Conservation District with land preservation, site development and improvements, trail and greenway developments, ecosystem restoration, historic restoration, and fish and wildlife habitat restoration. These granting sources include but are not limited to Bikeways, Snowmobile, Recreational Trails Program, Illinois Public Museum Capital Grants, Urban and Community Forest, C2000 Ecosystems Partnership Program, Wildlife Preservation Funds, Illinois Conservation Foundation Grants, DOA-Sustainable Agricultural Grants, IEPA-Clean Waters Grants, and IDOT Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) Grants.

- Funding for Parks, Recreation and Conservation  
Action: Support measures that preserve local control by local officials to determine the amount of their annual levy by protecting the CPI-growth within the PTELL.

Action: Oppose the State’s division of local revenues such as the Personal Property Replacement Tax.

Action: Support additional funding for the Youth Recreation Corps Grant program to provide more first-time job opportunities and experiences for youth.

Action: Support funding for grants administered by the Illinois Arts Council.

Action: Support the appropriation of a portion of revenues from any new or additional sin tax for park, recreation and conservation purposes.

- Preservation of Dedicated Accounts  
Appropriations - General Revenue Fund  
Future “sweeps” of dedicated park, recreation, and conservation accounts into the General Fund should be prevented so that the dedicated funds can be used as intended.

Action: Discontinue raiding Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Fund (OSLAD) and Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF) and other dedicated funds for other purposes.

- Farmland Protection  
Protecting farmland provides natural corridors for wildlife, serves as an important buffer to high-quality natural areas, allows for groundwater recharge, provides locally-grown food, and creates recreational opportunities and tourism. In order to facilitate the purchase of development rights programs, counties need the authority to go to referendum to ask voters to raise funds through property or sales tax for farmland protection purposes. Money raised locally can be matched by the Federal Farm Protection Program. State legislation is needed to give counties the opportunity to save farmland and support the agricultural economy.

Action: Support creating or increasing funding and programs to support farming practices that reduce the use of chemicals and fuel. Support giving counties the authority to ask voters through referendum to support raising county property or sales taxes for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

- Protection of Wildlife in Illinois - Habitats of Special Significance  
Illinois is home to some 58 mammal species, 383 different resident and migrant birds, 104 types of reptiles and amphibians, 174 species of fish, and some 27,000 types of insects, mussels, and other invertebrates. The diverse array of animal species that inhabit Illinois depend, directly or indirectly, on one another— and removing any one species may result in disproportionately high numbers of another, as certain species prey on others. The Illinois Environmental Council reported that “a 2004 study showed that 27% of Illinois

flora was non-native. The dominating presence of non-native plants lessens the space available for native plants, thereby diminishing Illinois's unique, indigenous plant communities. Insects requiring those native plants, and the species that rely on those insects, are also imperiled by the loss of native plant species.”

Native habitats are key to our wildlife's future—unfortunately, habitats in Illinois have changed enormously and many wildlife populations have declined at alarming rates as a result. For example, the size of woodlands in Illinois act as a limiting factor on some native species' populations, making the protection of larger size woodlands necessary. Moreover, there are cross-benefits to protecting wildlife habitat—flood control, recreation, soil erosion control, and open space.

The Illinois economy realizes nearly \$1.1 billion every year from expenditures related to watching wildlife and hunters spend nearly \$150 million a year pursuing game. More than \$550 million is spent on recreational fishing, and the annual retail value of commercial fishing is \$4 million. The wildlife-oriented recreation plays an important economic role throughout the region.

Action: Support the protection and preservation of indigenous Illinois species and tighten efforts against invasive species. Support utilizing the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan and the Illinois Endangered and Threatened Species Act as a focal point for establishing species protection goals.

- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Administration & Budget  
The Illinois Department of Natural Resources benefits from having leadership that is qualified in the conservation, park and recreation profession. Adequate and consistent funding for Illinois General Revenue funding for IDNR to continue existing IDNR services is supported, as is diversification of IDNR revenue sources to provide a sustainable funding stream for the long term. IDNR support of the US Fish & Wildlife Service's Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, Chicago Wilderness and other regional efforts such as the Ecosystem Partnerships for the Fox River and Kishwaukee River should be strengthened.

Action: Support adequate funding for IDNR to continue existing services and retention and hiring of leadership that is qualified in the conservation, park and recreation profession.

- Other Legislation of Interest

HB2297 - Dissolution of Police Force - FPD of Cook County

Amends the Cook County Forest Preserve District Act. Provides that 91 days after the effective date of the amendatory Act: (1) the forest preserve district board's authority to appoint and maintain a police force is terminate; and (2) the Cook County Sheriff's Department shall exercise primary jurisdiction over the territory within the forest preserve district. Effective immediately.

The McHenry County Conservation District and the McHenry County Sheriff's Office discussed, debated and did a cost analysis on a similar measure this past year. From the results of the study, the Conservation District's Board of Trustees adopted a position paper to advocate their support to maintain control and authority for their own police force.

Action: Oppose HB2297.

#### HB5253 and SB2999 Design-Build Companion Bills

Creates the Forest Preserve District and Conservation District Design-Build Authorization Act. Provides that a forest preserve district or conservation district may enter into design-build contracts. Includes scope and performance criteria for design-build contracts, a two-phase procedure for selection of contracts, requirements for submission of proposals, procedures for awarding contracts, and requirements of reports and evaluation of contracts. Provides that if the total overall cost of a project is estimated to be less than \$12,000,000, the forest preserve or conservation district may combine the two-phase procedure for selection into one phase. Amends the Conservation District Act, Downstate Forest Preserve District Act, and Cook County Forest Preserve District Act making conforming changes. Further amends those Acts increasing the minimum contract amount to \$50,000 (currently \$25,000) before competitive bidding is required. Effective January 1, 2021.

Action: Support HB5253 and SB2999.

#### HB 4405 - 2 Year Grant Recovery Act

Amends the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Act. Provides that any portion of an advanced grant payment not expended by a grantee within 2 years shall be returned to the Department of Natural Resources for distribution with the remainder of the grant on a reimbursement basis. Clarifies that grant funds may be made available for expenditure by a grantee for a period longer than 2 years as long as the grant funds have been legally obligated by the unit of local government prior to the expiration of the 2-year period. Effective immediately.

Action: Support HB4405

#### SB 3220 Amends County Code - Shared Services

Amends the Counties Code. Creates the Countywide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan Division. Provides that a shared services panel is created in each county consisting of the county executive or chairperson of the county board and a representative of each municipality and township in the county. Provides that municipalities with a population greater than 1,000,000 are not required to, but may, participate. Allows the county executive or chairperson to invite representatives of other governmental units (units of local government and school districts) to participate. Provides that the county executive or chairperson shall prepare a countywide shared services property tax savings plan for initial approval by the county board. Provides that the plan shall contain new recurring property tax savings through actions such as, but not limited to: the elimination of duplicative services; shared services, such as joint purchasing, shared highway equipment, shared storage facilities, shared plowing services, and energy and insurance purchasing cooperatives; reduction

in back office administrative overhead; and better coordination of services. After review by the county board, requires the shared services panel to approve the plan on or before December 31, 2021. Includes provisions regarding public input, presentation of the plan, implementation of the plan, and resubmittal of a failed plan. Limits home rule powers. Amends the State Mandates Act to require implementation without reimbursement.

Action: Support 3220, provided that the Conservation District is required to participate on the shared services panel. The current legislation implies but does not explicitly state that the conservation district be part of the shared services panel.

- Unfunded Mandates

Legislation currently being monitored in the 101<sup>st</sup> Illinois General Assembly related to Unfunded Mandates:

SB3311 (Peters) Lead Testing all Parks

Amends the Illinois Plumbing License Law. Provides that each park authority or its designee shall test each source of potable water in each of its public buildings and parks and notify the public of the results. Provides requirements for testing and notification. Provides requirements for requests seeking waiver of testing. Provides that the Director of Public Health shall conduct hearings and impose civil penalties in relation to violations of the provisions concerning lead testing in parks. Provides that schools constructed on or before January 1, 2014 shall conduct testing for lead in water and submit samples to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. Amends the Illinois Environmental Protection Act. Provides that the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency shall accept and analyze drinking water samples collected under those provisions of the Illinois Plumbing License Law. Provides that the Agency shall collect a fee for each sample accepted for analysis.

IAPD is opposed to this legislation due to it being an unfunded mandate and cost prohibitive to park and municipal park and recreation agencies.

IEC is supportive as the right thing to do and to protect all children from lead exposure.

Action: Support SB1270



## FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE ISSUES OF INTEREST - 116<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS

- Full and Dedicated Funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) - Saving America's Treasures - Great American Outdoors Act  
America's most important conservation and recreation program, which has saved places in nearly every state and every county in the U.S., expired on September 30, 2018. President Trump signed the Bill to permanently authorize LWCF on March 12, 2019; however, the FY 2020 budget request to Congress makes deep cuts to the program.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965 was enacted to “preserve, develop, and assure access to outdoor recreation resources in order to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States.”

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was a bipartisan commitment to safeguard natural areas, water resources and our cultural heritage, and to provide recreation opportunities to all Americans. National parks like Rocky Mountain, the Grand Canyon, and the Great Smoky Mountains, as well as national wildlife refuges, national forests, rivers and lakes, community parks, trails, and ball fields in every one of our 50 states were set aside for Americans to enjoy thanks to federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

LWCF is not funded by taxpayer dollars but from fees collected for the depletion of one natural resource - offshore oil and gas - to support the conservation of another precious resource - our land and water. Every year, \$900 million in royalties paid by energy companies drilling for oil and gas on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) are put into this fund. The money is intended to protect national parks, areas around rivers and lakes, national forests, and national wildlife refuges from development, and to provide matching grants for state and local parks and recreation projects. Over the years, LWCF has also grown and evolved to include grants to protect working forests, wildlife habitat, critical drinking water supplies and disappearing battlefields, as well as increased use of easements.

Almost every year, Congress breaks its own promise to the American people and diverts much of this funding to uses other than conserving our most important lands and waters.

As a result, there is a substantial backlog of federal conservation needs estimated at more than \$30 billion—including places vulnerable to development such as the Florida Everglades, Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming, Civil War battlefields in Virginia, our shrinking Northern forests, and other precious places around the country. State governments also report needing \$27 billion in LWCF funds for eligible local parks and recreation projects.<sup>2</sup>

Two keystone programs within LWCF are the federal land acquisition program and the State Assistance program. The State Assistance program provides funds to states and localities through matching grants for capital projects.

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<sup>2</sup> Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition. Retrieved March 1, 2018 from <http://lwcfcoalition.org>.

When originally authorized, the Act required a minimum of 60% of the funding to go to the State Assistance program and 40% to go to the federal land acquisition program. In the late 1970s, the State Assistance provision was removed, and current law permits 40%-100% of LWCF funding to go to the federal land acquisition program.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance program is a matching federal grant program administered by the National Park Service and is a key funding mechanism for local park and recreation and leverages matching local public and private dollars for every grant dollar. Investments from the LWCF State Assistance program has enabled the McHenry County Conservation District to leverage bond referenda dollars approved by the voters of McHenry County and other local funds for important projects to preserve land, restore habitats for migratory wildlife, improve public access to outdoor recreation, spur economic growth, educate local residents, combat childhood obesity, care for historic sites, and protect the environment. There has been proposed elimination of the state assistance program. Across the country there are a growing backlog of need and deferred maintenance at all levels of parks.

On March 9, 2020, A bipartisan group of 56 U.S. senators - a majority of the U.S. Senate - has introduced the Great American Outdoors Act, which would fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and restore national parks by helping address the backlog of maintenance needs.

“Passing this bill would be as historic for conservation and outdoor recreation as the original passage of LWCF 56 years ago,” said The Nature Conservancy’s Interim CEO Sally Jewell and former Secretary of the Department of the Interior. “I have been to national parks and other public lands in every state. These are places of respite, and places that we can all go to celebrate our history, our culture, our challenges and our triumphs. They are places I go with my grandchildren now to help them understand what a gift we have in our public lands, and I’m glad to see Congress act to preserve that gift for future generations.”

The Great American Outdoors Act combines two previous bills that each have strong bipartisan support from more than half of Congress. The first would provide full and permanent funding of \$900 million each year for LWCF, the amount it is authorized to receive from offshore oil and gas revenues - not tax dollars. It has been used for more than 50 years to protect places in every state in the nation ranging from national parks to historic battlefields to local ballfields. The second, the Restore Our Parks Act, would invest \$1.9 billion annually for the next five years in deferred maintenance for lands managed by the National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Education.

**Action:** Support full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Support legislative efforts which would fund the State Assistance Program.

Support S. 3422, the Great American Outdoors Act. This important legislation will provide increased funding for parks and recreation in our state for generations to come by providing full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Support S. 500, the Restore Our Parks Act. This important legislation established the National Park Service Legacy Restoration Act and requires 50% of all energy development revenues for FY 2019 to FY 2023 to be deposited in such fund. Amounts deposited in the fund must not exceed \$1.3 billion for any fiscal year and must be used for meeting the priority deferred maintenance needs of the National Park Service.

- Support the Funding of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge  
The National Wildlife Refuge System was created on March 14, 1903, by President Theodore Roosevelt through the first bird reservation with Florida's 5.5 acre Pelican Island. National Wildlife Refuges across the country provide some of the most important habitat for fish, wildlife, and waterfowl and offer incredible recreational opportunities for hunters, anglers, birdwatchers, and countless others who enjoy the outdoors. Wildlife Refuges in the United States are visited 34 million times a year by birdwatchers, photographers, educators and researchers, conservationists, hunters, fishers and hikers. In addition, refuges contribute to local and regional economies, generating \$1.7 billion in sales and supporting 27,000 private-sector jobs.

Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge in NE Illinois and SE Wisconsin was established on November 6, 2012. Funding of the refuge will enhance protection and restoration of habitat for federally and state-listed endangered and threatened species, and expand public education and outdoor recreation opportunities. Funding for National Wildlife Refuges comes from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. As proposed, Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge will protect private property rights and retain local ownership and control of existing public conservation areas, forest preserves and parks. It will also enhance protection and restoration of habitat for federally and state-listed endangered, threatened and protected species and expand public education and outdoor recreational opportunities, all nearby to the Chicago region and other major metropolitan areas in the Midwest.

Action: Support the continued implementation of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge in NE Illinois and SE Wisconsin including allocating "on the ground" resources locally to assist with protecting, preserving, and restoring unique habitats in and around the wildlife refuge boundary.

- Funding for Federal Matching Grant and Assistance Programs  
Federal matching grant programs leverage bond dollars approved by McHenry County Conservation District voters and other local funds for important projects to acquire and preserve open space and historic sites, protect and restore natural habitats, care for historic buildings, educate local citizens, develop trails, create connections and improve other public access amenities for outdoor recreation. The McHenry County Conservation District is part of a system of natural areas, conservation areas, forest preserves, parks, outdoor recreation and historic facilities at the national, state, regional, county and local levels. Full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, including

stateside pass-through grants to local agencies and similar national grant programs such as State and Tribal Wildlife Grants and North American Wetlands Conservation Act, acquire and restore habitats needed by migratory wildlife, create multi-agency trail and greenway corridors, acquire and manage lands along waterways, promote public health through outdoor recreation and preserve and restore historic sites.

Action: Support funding of federal matching grant and assistance programs.

- Tax Exempt Public Bonds

McHenry County voters have overwhelmingly and consistently supported referenda to authorize the Conservation District to issue tax-exempt bonds for the acquisition and preservation of open space and historic sites, protection and restoration of natural habitats and development of trails and other public access amenities. Removal or reduction of the tax exemptions would increase costs to McHenry County voters for future bond issues.

Action: Oppose the removal or reduction of the tax exemptions that would increase costs to McHenry County voters for future bond issues.

- Chicago Wilderness as a National Model for Urban Conservation

McHenry County Conservation District is a founding member and active participant in Chicago Wilderness. The broad-based grassroots coalition has improved efforts to preserve and restore natural areas found throughout McHenry County and the region by enhancing public communications, education and outreach. Chicago Wilderness allows federal agencies to invest in regional projects that fulfill federal conservation priorities in an urban region. As a national model for urban conservation, Chicago Wilderness is teaming up with other members of the “Metropolitan Greenspaces Alliance” to pursue continued federal support for large-scale regional conservation.

Action: Pursue renewed federal funding support for Chicago Wilderness from US Fish and Wildlife Services, US Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry, US Environmental Protection Agency, and National Park Service.

- Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 - Conservation Title of the Farm Bill

Every five years, Congress renews the Farm Bill, a comprehensive piece of legislation that includes farm and agricultural policies. The last bill was enacted on December 20, 2018 and is known as the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 and supports conservation, wildlife and renewable energy.<sup>3</sup> The Conservation Title Programs include Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Voluntary Public Access Program. This program will remain in force through 2023, although some provisions extend beyond that time.

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<sup>3</sup> United States House of Representatives. Retrieved April 9, 2019 from <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20181210/CRPT-115hrpt1072.pdf>

Several provisions of Title II of the Farm Bill are dedicated to Conservation and provides funding for farm environmental stewardship through programs that improve farm management practices, retire land, and protect farmland and other natural resources. Conservation programs recognize that the health of America's soil, water and other natural resources is essential to long term productivity and economic viability of agriculture and forestry, that protecting and managing our natural resources is critical to the future of America's communities, and that most of our nation's opportunities for hunting, fishing, and observing nature depend upon privately owned habitat on farms, ranches and forest land.

Signed by President Trump on December 20, 2018 Pub. L. 115-334 amended and extended major programs adding \$30.2B in new spending through 2028.<sup>4</sup>

Action: Support conservation program funding levels as identified in the 2018 Farm Bill.

- Parks and Critical Components of Infrastructure  
Renewed discussion of the need to rebuild our challenged infrastructure is welcomed and included parks and trails.

Action: Support legislation that would allow for direct investment, tax-incentives, innovative financing or, "all of the above", to ensure that any new federal infrastructure investment strategy includes parks and recreation, active transportation options, as well as "mixed-use" infrastructure as critical pieces to (re)building vibrant and resilient local communities in every corner of the country.

- Conservation, Trail Easement & Working Lands for Wildlife Incentives  
The enhanced tax incentive for Conservation Easement Donations was made permanent with strong bi-partisan support in 2015. The conservation easement tax incentive does the following: (a) Raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30 percent of his or her income in any year to 50 percent; (b) Allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100 percent of their income; and (3) Extends the carry-forward period for a donor to take tax deductions for a voluntary conservation agreement from 5 to 15 years.<sup>5</sup>

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetland and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-government organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of land. This program protects the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Lands protected by agricultural land easements provides additional public benefits including environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitats and protection of open space. Under the program, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) may contribute up to 50% of the fair market value

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hr2>.

<sup>5</sup> Land Trust Alliance. Retrieved March 9, 2018 from <http://landtrustalliance.org>.

of the agricultural land easement. Where NRCS determines that grasslands of special environmental significance will be protect, NRCS may contribute up to 75% of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement. Eligible partners of the program include state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland, rangeland or grassland protection programs.

Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) program is a voluntary option for private land owners and provides funding to carry out high priority wetland protection, restoration and enhancement and to improve wildlife habitat. This program is part of ACEP.

Action: Support the preservation of the legislation that allows for enhanced tax incentives for donors of conservation easements, agricultural land easements and wetland reserve easements.

- Endangered Species, Clean Air and Clean Water  
McHenry County Conservation District is home to numerous rare, threatened and endangered species. McHenry County voters have consistently supported these efforts through referenda to preserve and restore habitat for these native plants and animals. Additionally, the McHenry County Conservation District supports legislative initiatives that strengthen Clean Air and Clean Water to ensure the health and sustainability of McHenry County residents. Specifically, the USEPA and other agencies need to continue initiatives designed to protect and improve water quality and supply in and around the watersheds of McHenry County and Lake Michigan. Federal discussions about potential changes to environmental protection laws and regulations should be held separately and transparently, not combined with budgetary bills or other issues.

Action: Oppose legislative issues that diminishes the preservation and protection of Endangered Species, Clean Air and Clean Water.

Dedicated Funding for Active Transportation - Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails  
Transportation and infrastructure investments are expected to be a key policy goal of the Trump Administration.

Transportation connections to public lands and parks have been an essential component of transportation policy and planning for more than three decades. Public open areas (including recreational trails, parks, and green spaces) are considered essential to attract and retain a diverse, vibrant, and economically healthy community.

During the last two decades, dedicated funding for trails, bicycle and pedestrian programs has added more dollars to local economies; enhanced our safety, health and quality of life; and contributed to the renaissance of our cities and towns by attracting new residents, employers and fostering a new kind of tourism.

Since 1992, funding for biking and pedestrian projects has been provided through three main transportation programs: 1) the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), 2) Transportation Enhancements (TE), and 3) Safe Routes to Schools Program (SRTS) with dedicated funding provided for each. Additionally, the

former transportation law required states to provide a specified amount of their federal surface transportation dollars to bike and pedestrian projects through the TE program - making the TE program the single biggest source of funding for bike and pedestrian projects.

Dedicated funding for key programs that connect communities, make streets safer, and promote healthy modes of transportation such as walking and biking have been accomplished through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), including the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Safe Routes to Schools, as well as Parks. Combined, these programs found in the federal surface transportation bill, the FAST Act provide approximately \$800 million annually for bike and pedestrian projects and promote pedestrian and bicycling safety in local communities. The FAST Act funds surface transportation programs until October 2021.

Reintroduction of the New Opportunities for Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Financing Act would provide local communities with low-cost loans to build networks of sidewalks, bike lands and paths as part of the federal transportation financing program known as TIFIA. Twenty five percent (25%) of the loan financing for this program must be used to help low-income communities.

Action: Support legislation that will protect and maintain dedicated funding for key programs that connect communities, make streets safer, and promote healthy modes of transportation such as walking and biking - accomplished primarily through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), including the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Safe Routes to Schools, as well as Parks. Combined, these programs, found in the federal surface transportation law, known as the “FAST Act”, provide approximately \$800 million annually for bike and pedestrian projects and to promote pedestrian and bicycling safety in local communities. The FAST Act funds surface transportation programs until October 2021.

Action: Support maximum flexibility in how agencies can use transportation funding for parks and recreation activities.

- STEM in Parks and Recreation

Park and recreation agencies provide flexible learning environments for their students and are increasingly focused on coding, physical science, and innovative STEM programming not typically available to disadvantaged, rural, and low-income children during the school day or at home.

Approximately one-third of park and recreation agencies around the country offer STEM programming, meaning 1 in 3 park and recreation agencies provide students with the chance to have hands-on experiences in the careers of tomorrow.

Park and recreation agencies can offer students the space to:  
Explore interests and improve competencies, such as team work, communication and problem-solving; Inspire technological curiosity, improve creativity, and promote deeper critical thinking; and Endow children with in-demand technological skills required for 21st century jobs.

Congress reauthorized these programs through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Perkins Career Technical Education (CTE) Act.

Action: Support legislation that strengthens career and technical education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

- Community Transformation Grants - Health, Wellness and Physical Activity  
Public parks and recreation play a vital role in improving the overall health and wellness of the nation. Because parks provide the spaces, places and opportunities for physical activity as well as nutrition programs, they are essential partners in combating some of the most complicated challenges our country faces - poor nutrition, hunger and obesity - and they play an important role in creating positive health outcomes.

Funding for prevention programs through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention helps create substantial and sustainable community level programs that prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases through active living, healthy eating, tobacco-free living and clinical and community preventative services. These grant programs support state and local government entities such as park, recreation and conservation agencies.

Action: Support the maintenance of funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through Health and Human Services, Labor and Education Appropriations. Ensure parks and recreation agencies are included as directly eligible partners in any federal strategy or guidelines aimed at increasing physical activity at the local level.

- Community Transformation Grants - Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)  
The Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These grants support local community development activities aimed at neighborhood revitalization, development and improvement of community facilities such as parks and recreation. Historically this program has provided up to \$100 million in annual funding to local park and recreation agencies. The program focuses on low-income communities and serves as a vital lifeline for agencies facing project funding gaps. Every \$1.00 spent of CDBG is leveraged into approximately \$3.65 in private and local funding.

Action: Support the maintenance of funding for the Community Development of Block Grants through the Department of Housing and Urban Development appropriations. Oppose the elimination of the program.












# 10.18a 20-25 Legislative Program (RES)

Final Audit Report

2020-03-27

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