

Testimony of Conrad Anker
On behalf of the LWCF Coalition
In Support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Michael Simpson, Chairman
The Honorable James Moran, Ranking Member

April 15, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Moran, and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in the FY 2012 Interior Appropriations Bill. My name is Conrad Anker and I am appearing today on behalf of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Coalition. The Coalition represents a broad array of groups and individuals across the country who value land conservation and outdoor recreation with members from ranging from business leaders to sportsmen to conservation organizations.

I have had the great good fortune to combine my personal passion for the outdoors with my career as an alpinist and professional athlete. For the past 27 years I have worked with The North Face, an apparel and equipment company based in San Leandro, California with annual sales of \$1.4 billion and over 425 employees. Today I manage the athlete program to encourage and support outdoor participation. My work also involves initiatives to engage youth in the outdoors and corporate sustainability. The North Face is very aware that the attributes of nature are part of the brand DNA. As such it is important to our business model that we have places for our customers to use their products.

I spend a good deal of my time traveling to towns and cities across the country, speaking on behalf of The North Face to audiences who view outdoor recreation as an essential part of their daily lives. From the California Desert to the Sawtooth National Recreation Area to Virginia's Civil War battlefields, the landscapes vary but the themes are consistent: access to the outdoors defines our communities and the fabric of our lives.

It is instructive to note that in the last 11 years The North Face has led in sales and growth among its sister companies of Vanity Fair (VFC), its parent corporation. Even in these tough economic times when families need to cut back on spending, people are willing to invest in outdoor recreation. They understand that it is a wise investment that reaps benefits to their health and well being. In turn, this spending supports jobs and helps sustain economic vibrancy in our communities. And, the popularity and demand for opportunities to visit land in its natural state will only increase as population grows and these natural places increase in esthetic and economic value.

The outdoor industry is one of America's fastest growing sectors and yet its contributions to the health of the American economy are not widely recognized. Our industry is highly recession resistant, contributes over \$730 billion to the American economy each year, and generates \$88 billion in annual state and federal tax revenue. 6.5 million American jobs are supported by the active outdoor recreation economy. The outdoor sector is a truly major part of the U.S. economy, one that America still dominates globally, and one that represents opportunities for sustained economic growth in communities, rural and urban, across America.

The direct and indirect impacts of the outdoor industry can be broken down as follows: Americans spend \$46 billion each year on active, outdoor equipment, apparel, footwear, accessories, and services. Additionally, they spend approximately \$243 billion on outdoor excursions within our sector every year. This adds up to \$289 billion in direct expenditures. The indirect expenditures, totaling \$441 billion, are the result of a ripple effect—the sum total of economic interactions that impact and benefit each other. This ripple effect encompasses manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, real estate and rentals, accommodations and food services, financing and insurance, professional services (such as technical and scientific).

The outdoor industry's significant contributions to our national economy rely heavily upon America's iconic and unique parks and forests, our mountains and rivers and wide open spaces—natural resources that are recognized and respected around the world. Our nation's unparalleled outdoor resources are of course about much more than dollars and cents. They are the places that provide us with recreation and refuge, that connect us to our past, that let us experience the natural world and its abundant wildlife, and that in many other ways define us as a people. Still, as I and others speak with you today about the need to protect these remarkable assets for our children and theirs, please keep in mind that these lands also are a very real and integral part of the environmental infrastructure that sustains millions of jobs and some \$730 billion in economic activity each year.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is the premier federal program to ensure that all Americans have access to the outdoors. Whether it is a local community park or playground, or the vast expanses of our federal public lands, Congress created the LWCF in 1964 to guarantee America's natural, historical and outdoor recreation heritage. In 1968, Congress had the wisdom to authorize an income stream for LWCF from offshore oil and gas leasing revenues – not taxpayers' dollars. With an average of over \$6 billion coming in from offshore leasing royalties annually (and significantly more expected in future years), \$900 million for the LWCF account is a wise and balanced conservation offset to offshore energy development. Yet, this account has been shortchanged by over \$17 billion over the life of the program.

As a professional adventurer, I believe outdoor experiences inspire and nourish the human spirit. In children, these formative experiences foster creativity and confidence and nurture the entrepreneurial spirit that will build America's success of tomorrow. And, a lifetime of fitness, instilled by early access to outdoor recreation, has

incalculable quality of life and public health benefits both to individuals and to our society as a whole. Children who play outside are healthier, socialize easier and foster a sense of curiosity, the cornerstone of innovation. Education and innovation are vitally important to the economic well being of our nation.

America's unique public land heritage sets an example the world over. It epitomizes the spirit of self-reliance, independence and opportunity that we inherited and should bequeath to our children. In the words of President Theodore Roosevelt: "Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us."

In my home state of Montana, LWCF funding is helping our communities to protect our ranching way of life along the Rocky Mountain Front, conserving blue ribbon trout streams in the Madison Valley of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and maintaining working forests and intact watersheds along the Kootenai River. These projects complement state, local and private land protection dollars, enhance public access for hunting, fishing and other recreation, preserve community watersheds and clean water supplies, and reduce wildfire threats by avoiding development in fire prone areas surrounding our towns and cities.

Purchase of key inholdings across our public lands is a wise investment of taxpayer dollars that often solve management problems and reduce costs to the taxpayer. In Montana's Swan Valley, LWCF funding is helping to consolidate the checkerboard ownership pattern, a remnant of the 19th century railroad land grants. This eliminates alternate sections of private property with the national forests, thereby reducing the threat of inappropriate development and the associated management challenges and costs.

In the Kootenai River watershed of northwestern Montana, funding in FY 2012 through the Forest Legacy Program, (included under the umbrella of LWCF-funded conservation programs), will allow 28,000 acres of critical resource and recreation lands to be conserved by a working forest conservation easement. These lands and their wildlife and fisheries resources will be forever conserved for public use and enjoyment while continuing to be managed as a sustainable, working forest by a private timber company. This is a win-win that maintains vital timber industry jobs and production while supporting the state's recreation economy.

The benefits of these efforts to the Montana recreation and tourism economy run deep: active outdoor recreation activities generate \$2.5 billion in revenues annually to Montana's economy and support 34,000 jobs. Hunting, fishing and wildlife observation alone engage over 950,000 people in Montana each year that spend over \$1.1 billion in our local communities. The outdoor industry sector experiences gains from retail sales of gear and equipment while a myriad of other local businesses, restaurants, and hotels see expanded sales and activity. These economic benefits of land conservation are not unique to Montana. They extend across the country to states, counties and towns where

LWCF funding is augmenting conservation and supporting local businesses and communities.

Enhancing access to the outdoors for active recreation – provided by the investments of the LWCF – directly supports local jobs across our communities and the recreation economy. If we are serious about creating jobs and getting the economy back on track, conservation spending on LWCF is not only a wise, but an essential investment. It reaps immediate and tangible benefits in our communities across the tourism, service and outdoor recreation sectors. Further, the Forest Legacy Program invests not only to promote sustainable forestry but also to create jobs in restoration, infrastructure maintenance, and associated industries.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, for these diverse reasons I join with the LWCF Coalition and many others across the nation in urging you to provide robust funding for LWCF in Fiscal Year 2012. We all understand the severe financial constraints under which you and this Congress are operating; at the same time, we recognize that America simply cannot afford to lose the natural, recreational, and other public opportunities that LWCF provides, or the activity it injects into the American economy. On a bipartisan basis, many members of this Subcommittee and throughout Congress recognize the critical importance of LWCF and of the current time-sensitive investments that are needed to maintain and expand public access to and enjoyment of the outdoors. Those clear needs also are expressed in the Administration's budget request for FY 2012, which recommends full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund at the Congressionally authorized level of \$900 million. This funding level would fuel wise and necessary investments in high-priority, now-or-never, willing-seller projects within our national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, wild and scenic rivers, national trails, and other lands; in state-side LWCF grants to all fifty states and territories, enhancing our state and local parks and trails; and in non-federal protection of working forests, key wildlife habitat, and other irreplaceable outdoor resources.

In this time of fiscal challenges, LWCF is an investment that simply cannot be deferred. Not only does it protect our most cherished, singularly American places, but at the same time it produces enormous, direct, tangible economic returns to communities across the country. As we all commit ourselves to America's economic recovery, as LWCF's offshore oil and gas revenues continue to flow into the treasury, and as land-use pressures increasingly jeopardize the economic, recreational, and other public values of our nation's outdoor resources, now is the time for LWCF. I therefore respectfully ask that you do all you can to fully fund this vital program. Thank you.

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