
Sale Prior to Acquisition

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is the primary means by which the federal government acquires new land. Unfortunately, federal land acquisition can cause major problems for communities and units of local government, especially in areas where federal land is already so prevalent. While the federal government reimburses state and local governments with what is known as Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT), they are miniscule compared to the property taxes that could otherwise be generated by private ownership. Additionally, the federal government is notoriously bad at maintaining its land holdings. In fact, it currently has a \$19.38 billion maintenance backlog on its lands.

To ensure that the federal government does not continue to acquire additional acreage weakening rural communities' economies and adding to the federal government's maintenance responsibilities, we should require the federal agency acquiring new lands under the LWCF to first dispose of lands of equal or greater value in the same state. This will do two things: first, it will allow for the market to determine the value of land that that is disposed of and acquired; and second, it will spur the sale of federal public lands which has dwindled in recent decades and help to support local property tax revenues.

At a time when COVID-19 has put tremendous strain on communities and local governments, the federal government should be returning, not acquiring, lands to facilitate growth.

Amendment Specifics

- Would prohibit the acquisition of new lands by the federal government using LWCF dollars until land of equal or greater value has been sold.
- Would allow the difference between the sale price and the price of new acquired land to be credited towards other acquisitions or towards other LWCF purposes.