America's Best Idea at Risk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Examples of Past Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Zion National Park, Utah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Saguaro National Park, Arizona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Petersburg National Battlefield, Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Conclusion &amp; Acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
America’s Best Idea at Risk

Our national parks are America’s Best Idea. They protect our irreplaceable natural and cultural resources, preserve the stories of our past, and connect Americans to the outdoors.

But our national parks are also at risk. Across the country, a significant amount of privately-owned land in and around our national parks is threatened by development, endangering the long-term protection of these special places.

Known as inholdings, these properties can present serious challenges for resource protection and visitor experience. They threaten to mar vistas with development, impede recreational access, and damage the parks’ rich natural and historical resources. Managing around inholdings is often difficult, and may increase the potential for wildfire danger and the contamination of streams and waterways. Once these inholdings are developed or subdivided, they are lost forever.

The National Park Service has identified approximately 2.6 million acres of private lands within the authorized boundaries of national parks that need to be protected, at an estimated price tag of approximately $2 billion.

But every year, Congress has diverted nearly half of the funds of this critical program for other purposes. LWCF is an investment in our future, but it is an empty promise without full, dedicated funding to protect land that is at risk.

This report highlights a small subsection of the many opportunities to purchase private lands from willing sellers to complete our national parks. Full funding for LWCF will help ensure that these critical inholdings are not lost forever.

According to a newly released economic analysis, the National Park System brings more than $40 billion in the US economy and tourism in National Parks directly supports over 300,000 jobs.
Examples of Past Success

Valles Caldera National Preserve, New Mexico

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been used to protect nearly all of Valles Caldera National Preserve, located in the center of the Jemez Mountains volcanic field in north-central New Mexico. Most recently, LWCF funding, in addition to support from the National Park Trust and private donors, allowed permanent protection of the last remaining inholding located inside the boundaries of the Preserve. The 40-acre parcel, known as Sulphur Springs, contains a collection of geothermal features that are found only in two other parks in the system; Yellowstone and Lassen Volcanic National Parks.

Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Colorado

Black Canyon of the Gunnison protects a unique landscape, formed slowly by water and rock scouring down through hard Proterozoic crystalline rock. Thanks to its notable landscape, the park offers incredible panoramic views and is home to a diverse population of plant and animal species.

LWCF funds have been critical to maintaining the park's integrity. Recently, LWCF helped protect the 2,494 acre Sanburg Ranch property, guaranteeing permanent public access to a portion of the park known as a top destination for anglers and backcountry users. This purchase helped to preserve the viewshed from the visitor center and South Rim Road, and protected wildlife habitat for elk, bear, mountain lions, and other animals. This protected land also provides a permanent water source for the South Rim of the park, saving the NPS a significant amount in operational costs as they previously had to haul in water to meet visitor and staff needs.
Grand Teton National Park is an iconic park recognized for its stunning landscapes and rich cultural history, with old homesteads and cattle ranches situated within its boundaries. Outdoor recreation enthusiasts flock to the park for boating, fishing, biking, and climbing.

LWCF funds, leveraged by private donations, have been critical to the continued protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources at Grand Teton National Park. In 2013, 86 acres of land along the Snake River were purchased using LWCF funds, protecting land that was particularly attractive to developers from becoming the site of houses and hotels. And 640 acres of land, known as Antelope Flats, were purchased in 2016, protecting the scenic views and wildlife-rich landscape.

In January 2020, with the help of partner organizations, the park was able to acquire a key 35-acre inholding, the third of six high-priority parcels, with LWCF funding. The land, just east of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort’s St. John’s Traverse, was highly threatened by residential development, given the mountain views.

But there are still 122 tracts of private land, totaling 924 acres, within the boundaries of the park, that remain at risk and a high priority for the NPS to acquire. LWCF funding continues to be needed in order to forever preserve the integrity of Grand Teton National Park.

Economic Impacts: In 2018, 3.5 million park visitors spent an estimated $629 million in local gateway regions while visiting Grand Teton National Park, supporting 8,620 jobs and $792 million in economic output.
In 1846, the United States and Mexico met for the first major battle of the U.S.-Mexican War. This important history is forever protected at Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park, the only National Park Service unit to interpret the events of the U.S.-Mexican War.

The park preserves much of the battle site, allowing visitors to walk in the footsteps of history in a landscape that exists almost as it was on the day of the battle, providing visitors with an understanding of the origins, events, and consequences of the U.S.-Mexican War.

Thanks to recent LWCF funding, 1,354 acres may be protected this year to improve the visitor experience and allow the public to access this incredible resource. Despite this success, much remains to be done to ensure the continued protection of the park’s resources.

There are still 18 tracts of private land, totaling 1,631 acres, within the authorized boundaries of the park. This means that roughly half of the park remains at risk of development. LWCF funds are needed to help protect the rest of the historical park and ensure future generations fully immerse themselves in a critical piece of history and learn about its continuing impact on the relationship between the United States and Mexico today.

Economic Impacts: In 2018, 82.5 thousand park visitors spent an estimated $4.9 million in local gateway regions while visiting Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park, supporting 73 jobs and $6.1 million in economic output.
Visitors flock to Zion National Park’s red-rock wonderland, with its slot canyons and towering walls, for rock climbing, hiking, and beautiful vistas. Zion is the third most visited national park in the country, drawing more than 4 million visitors in 2017.

Recent LWCF funding forever protected several critical pieces of this incredible landscape. In 2018, LWCF funds allowed for the acquisition of a key 35-acre parcel at Firepit Knoll near Zion’s Hop Valley trailhead, ensuring public access to the so-called Trans-Zion trek. And in 2019, the last unprotected mile of the world-famous Zion Narrows Trail was purchased using LWCF funds. This trail, because it sat on private property, was previously closed to visitor permits when the property owners announced a “trespassing fee” for hikers to cross their land.

However, over 3,000 acres of private land inside the boundaries of Zion National Park remain at risk of development. These inholdings are all ripe for development, in areas rich with wildlife corridors, iconic views, historic rock art, and water resources. This patchwork of private parcels impacts public access, complicates park management, and raises concerns over groundwater quality. It has even allowed some landowners to build large homes, marring the landscape.

LWCF funding is critically needed to alleviate these concerns and stop these lands from being converted to subdivisions and residential developments.

Economic Impacts: In 2018, 4.3 million park visitors spent an estimated $246 million in local gateway regions while visiting Zion National Park, supporting a total of 4,130 jobs and $327 million in economic output.
Saguaro National Park, Arizona

Saguaro National Park is a unique wilderness, bordered by over one million inhabitants in the Tucson metropolitan area and flanked in many areas by suburban neighborhoods. The park not only protects the iconic Saguaro Cacti, the universal symbol of the American Southwest, but is also home to diverse Sonoran Desert ecosystems, cultural and archeological features, and recreational opportunities.

LWCF funds helped secure over 40 acres of land on the east side of the national park, which were critical for the protection of habitat for the desert tortoise, Gila monsters and other desert species.

In the immediate future, NPS has identified a need for LWCF funding to create a bridge of protected wildlife habitat and open space, and a potential recreational trail linkage, between the Park and Pima County’s Sweetwater Preserve, one of the County’s most popular sites for hiking and mountain biking with an extensive non-motorized trail system.

In addition, 56 tracts of private land, totaling 1,007 acres, remain within the boundaries of the park. Without funding from LWCF, these lands are at risk. The population of Pima County has grown by 53% over the last 30 years and is expected to increase by an additional 25% or more over the next 25 years. If these acres are not acquired by the park, they are likely to be developed.

Economic Impacts: In 2018, 957 thousand park visitors spent an estimated $62.1 million in local gateway regions while visiting Saguaro National Park, supporting a total of 866 jobs and $90.9 million in economic output.
On the northwestern shores of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula lies Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, home to more than 60 miles of pristine, sandy Lake Michigan beaches, massive shoreline sand dunes, forested hills, quiet rivers and secluded inland lakes. It tells the geological history of continental glaciation, and the story of agricultural settlement, commerce, and maritime navigation.

Sleeping Bear Dunes is located in a rapidly developing area. Northern Michigan is a popular tourist destination and the Leelanau Peninsula, on which the park is situated, is a desired location for second homes and retirement living.

Since Sleeping Bear Dunes was established as a unit of the national park system in 1970, almost $100 million from LWCF has been invested to protect nearly all of the land within the park today. In the last five years alone, $5.6 million in LWCF funds have opened 400 acres to the public, including Lake Michigan beachfront, prime northern hardwood forest, and frontage on inland lakes including a beautiful historic log cabin on Glen Lake.

But 98 tracts of private land inside the Lakeshore boundary, totalling nearly 2,000 acres, remain unavailable to the public. These include historic farmsteads, view property, lakefront, and unique bog and kettle terrain containing excellent examples of ice block lakes and long forested valleys that were formed when the glaciers melted.

Economic Impacts: In 2018, 1.6 million park visitors spent an estimated $180 million in local gateway regions while visiting Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, supporting 2,470 jobs and $217 million in economic output.
The Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area is a vital outdoor recreation destination for the more than three million people who visit each year, and is widely used by runners, hikers, cyclists, birdwatchers, anglers, tubers, kayakers, and canoeists. Located near Atlanta, Georgia, many residents of this densely populated urban metropolis benefit from the acres of greenspace in their backyards.

LWCF funds have helped to protect the Chattahoochee River NPA’s scenic views and recreation opportunities for decades. However, as the population in the greater Atlanta region continues to grow, protecting green space for new recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat protection, and drinking water protection is more critical than ever.

LWCF funding is still needed to protect the 21-acre “Deep River Farm” property, on the western bank of the Chattahoochee River. The acquisition of this property would open public access to nearly 1,000 feet of river frontage and enable the National Park Service to expand recreational opportunities at the Bowman’s Island Unit, including additional access to hiking and horseback riding trails. The purchase of these inholdings will also prevent residential development on this property, protecting Atlanta’s primary source of drinking water from further pollution by sediment, chemical fertilizers, and runoff from impervious surfaces.

Economic Impacts: In 2018, 2.9 million park visitors spent an estimated $128 million in local gateway regions while visiting Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, supporting 1,820 jobs and $179 million in economic output.
Petersburg National Battlefield commemorates the last major campaign of the American Civil War, which led to General Robert E. Lee’s withdrawal from Petersburg and subsequent surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865.

In 2016, Congress enlarged the boundary of Petersburg National Battlefield by over 7,000 acres, the largest battlefield land expansion in decades. Of that 7,000 acres, roughly 2,700 acres (made up of five separate units, with the main unit located between the City of Petersburg and Prince George County), are currently, permanently protected. Although the park was initially established to protect historically significant areas and cultural resources, the area also protects wetlands, forests, open fields, and a variety of vegetation and wildlife.

In 2019, Congress approved LWCF funding to purchase unprotected battlefield land that is within the expanded boundary of the park, including White Oak Road Battlefield and Petersburg Breakthrough Battlefield. These and future acquisitions will help to complete the story of the Siege of Petersburg and prevent development that threatens the natural and cultural resources protected by this site.
Conclusion

LWCF funding is crucial to the successful management of our national parks and the continued protection of the irreplaceable natural and cultural resources that lay within the boundaries of those parks. From Palo Alto National Battlefield National Historical Park to Zion National Park, LWCF funding plays a huge role in preserving our national parks, America’s Best Idea.

We are calling on Congress to pass full, permanent, dedicated funding for LWCF to ensure that these critical inholdings are not lost forever. LWCF is an investment in our future, but it is an empty promise without the necessary funds to truly protect lands that are at risk.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the National Park Service for their assistance in compiling this information. We'd also like to thank our friends at the Trust for Public Land, the American Battlefield Trust, The Conservation Fund, and the LWCF Coalition.

About The Coalition

Our organization, the Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks (CPANP) is made up entirely of retired, past, and current National Park Service employees. Our members have over 40,000 years of collective experience managing our national parks and public lands. We know from first-hand experience how vital LWCF funds are to national parks. And we know that federal agencies rely on LWCF to acquire land for conservation and recreation. National parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, rivers, and lakes have been set aside for conservation and public enjoyment thanks to funds from LWCF.