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Montana's  
wildlife, land,  
waters, hunting  
and fishing  
heritage since  
1936*

-- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE --

July 25, 2011

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**MONTANA SPORTSMEN UP IN ARMS OVER VOTE TO DEFUND ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS**

16 Hook And Bullet Organizations In Montana Ask Representative Rehberg To Reconsider 80% Cut to Land and Water Conservation Fund

(Helena, MT) -- Sixteen hunting and angling organizations from across Montana have sent a letter expressing their disappointment with Rep. Rehberg for his recent vote on the Appropriations Committee to cut the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) by 80% from last year.

The Appropriations Committee passed a Bill on Tuesday, July 12, that would cut the LWCF to \$61 Million, all but eliminating critical access and conservation programs rural communities rely on during the hunting season. The full floor vote on the Bill is scheduled for today.

“The Appropriations Committee vote last week represents a continuation of the all-out assault on access to Montana’s public lands for hunting and fishing that Montana’s sportsmen and women successfully fended off during this previous state legislative cycle,” said Irv Wilke, President of the Billings Rod and Gun Club. “The Land and Water Conservation Fund directly supports conservation efforts in Montana that protect absolutely vital habitat for big game and our state’s blue ribbon fisheries. Cutting these funds by \$240 Million is ludicrous, especially before even once considering cuts to the estimated \$15 Billion in taxpayer subsidies to oil and gas companies. LWCF is not funded by one cent of taxpayer money and now it is being used as a political bargaining chip while Congress plays chicken with Montana’s recession proof outdoor industry.”

When it became law in 1965, the LWCF was intended to be funded at \$900 Million per year. This funding mechanism is only a small percentage of revenue from off-shore oil and gas drilling, but has since been gutted to \$301 Million in 2010.

“Our members and those of every organization who signed this letter hope to express the essential role funding for LWCF plays in creating access to public land and water which directly supports Montana’s \$2 Billion dollar outdoor industry,” said Tony Jones, President of the Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association in Hamilton. “Instead of voting with Montana’s hunters and anglers, Representative Rehberg has chosen to eliminate access programs essential for hunting and angling in Montana. Conversely, Sen. Baucus and Sen. Tester just reintroduced a bill in the Senate to fully fund the LWCF to \$900 Million and dedicate 1.5% of all LWCF funding to go towards increasing access to public lands.”

“On the chopping block with these unreasonable cuts is a conservation easement of 28,000 acres of Stimson Lumber Company land near Troy, Montana,” said Don Clark, President of the Libby Rod and Gun Club. “This deal would ensure that the land could not be sold for future commercial or real estate development. It protects timber jobs and permanent public access for recreation that we desperately need.”

The [Outdoor Industry Association](#) reports that outdoor recreation in Montana produces in an estimated \$2 Billion annually in retail sales and services across Montana accounting for 7.5% of gross state product. Furthermore, the report states that the outdoor industry supports 34,000 jobs and generates \$118 Million in annual state tax revenue. “That’s money in the bank for rural communities, sporting goods stores and

small businesses, and it helps provide good jobs in tough times,” said Ben Lamb, of the Montana Wildlife Federation.

"Not only does our outdoor heritage depend on funds from the LWCF, but so do portions of our state's economy," said John Borgreen, a member of the Russell Country Sportsman in Great Falls. "Nearly \$2 billion is pumped into the Montana economy every year from outdoor recreational activities and services, and of that total helping to sustain 34,000 jobs in our state. I hope that Rep. Rehberg joins Senators Baucus and Tester who have recently shown leadership on this issue by re-introducing a bill fully fund the LWCF to \$900 Million."

[In Montana](#) over the past 45 years, LWCF has provided approximately \$408 million to help protect clean water, wildlife habitat, and working landscapes, and provide access for hunting and fishing. Thanks to LWCF investments, Montanans can enjoy the Flathead and Gallatin National Forests, Red Rocks and Charles Russell National Wildlife Refuges, Bighorn Canyon, Meeteetse Spires, Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Swan Valley, the Rocky Mountain Front, as well as close-to-home recreational opportunities across the state.

“The 16 Montana hunting and fishing organizations who signed on to this letter today hope that Rep. Rehberg will reconsider his vote and say “no” to defunding access to public land for hunting and fishing in Montana,” said Les Castren, President of the Skyline Sportsman Association in Butte.

A House vote on the Interior Appropriations bill, which includes funding for LWCF, is scheduled for today, July 25.

Here is the letter that was sent to Rep. Rehberg today:

July 25, 2011

The Honorable Denny Rehberg  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2448 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Rehberg:

As representatives of Montana's hunting and fishing community we collectively wish to express our extreme disappointment in your support for the 2012 Interior Appropriations Bill, which takes Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) funding to its lowest level since it was created in the 1960s. The Bill's proposed \$61 Million budget is an 80% cut over last year's already small budget, the funding levels in this bill would eliminate funding for both the Tenderfoot Creek and Stimson Forestlands Projects in Montana. Both of these projects are critical for maintaining traditional access to our hunting grounds and in ensuring that elk have room to roam in Central and Western Montana. Simply put, eliminating this funding is a major setback for Montana's hunters and anglers.

The Tenderfoot Creek project is critical in maintaining access to elk herds that are both becoming off limits due to closed private lands surrounding them, and to help conserve critical habitat to ensure the future viability of that elk herd.

The Stimson Forestlands project in the Kootenai River Valley near Troy have been the traditional haunts of hunters and anglers since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The bond of shared access between the timber companies and hunters and anglers helped feed families in the winter. Loss of access to these lands by disallowing funding directly reduces the amount of land accessible to hunters. In a time of declining hunter numbers directly related to declining acres available for hunting, it makes no sense to vote against increased access for hunter opportunities. This vote will negatively impact the economic viability of rural communities that rely on hunting revenues in lean months.

The LWCF is the main federal program for conserving working lands, protecting wildlife habitats and providing Montana's roughly 250,000 hunters and anglers' access to high quality hunting lands and fishing waters. As you know, LWCF dollars do not come from our tax dollars. They come from a small percentage of royalties paid by oil companies for off-shore oil and gas leases, a common sense funding source for investing in sportsmen access and wildlife habitat. In fact, what this means is increased domestic production of our offshore oil and gas resources in a responsible manner helps increase hunter and angler access throughout the United States, which in turn increases revenues to small communities like Choteau, Troy, Townsend and Malta.

We are greatly concerned about your support for the drastic cuts to LWCF as proposed in the FY2012 Interior appropriations Bill, as they eliminate critical funding for both the Tenderfoot Creek and Stimson Forestlands projects. We further urge you to work proactively with House leadership through the rest of the appropriations process to defend and restore this critical program and to preserve Montana's hunting and fishing traditions.

Respectfully,

Lorry Thomas  
President, Anaconda Sportsman Association (Anaconda, MT)

Irv Wilke  
President, Billings Rod and Gun Club (Billings, MT)

Chuck Hunt  
President, Flathead Wildlife Inc. (Kalispell, MT)

Vito Quatraro  
President, Headwaters Sportsman Association (Bozeman, MT)

Stan Frasier  
President, Helena Hunters and Anglers Association (Helena, MT)

Land Tawney  
President, Hellgate Hunters and Anglers (Missoula, MT)

Herb Stoick  
President, Laurel Rod and Gun Club (Laurel, MT)

Don Clark  
President, Libby Rod and Gun Club (Libby, MT)

Greg Munther  
President, Montana Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (Missoula, MT)

Jason Tounsley  
President, Montana Bow Hunters Association (Billings, MT)

Tim Aldrich  
President, Montana Wildlife Federation (Helena, MT)

Hayes Goosey  
President, Park County Rod and Gun Club (Livingston, MT)

John Gibson  
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