

IBA NEWS: FULL FUNDING FOR LWCF?

The LWCF, a “conservation royalty account” from offshore oil and gas lease revenue going into the U.S. Treasury, has been critical in securing many locations designated as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the U.S. The LWCF is a funding vehicle that has been responsible for the creation and development of more than 40,000 national, state, and local parks, refuges, forests, and recreation areas in all fifty states, and 98% of all U.S. counties. Many birding hotspots have been preserved or enhanced through the LWCF.

Created in 1965, the LWCF reached its highest authorized level in 1977. At that point, the conservation royalty account reached \$900 million allowable per year, half for federal acquisition and half for state and local projects: \$450 million federal and \$450 million stateside. Adjusted for inflation, that would translate to \$3.2 billion per year in today's economy.

But just because the \$900 million per year is made available, it doesn't mean that it is ever appropriated by Congress. In fact, for a period beginning in 2000, a portion of LWCF monies was also shamelessly diverted to other programs. Only once in the history of LWCF has all the designated money been used for the original intent. Even this year, when the LWCF received over \$300 million – its greatest allocation in many years - it is still only a third of what it is supposed to be. In the meantime, there is a backlog of more than \$30 billion worth of lands that federal agencies would like to protect and a list of state and local land-based projects that go wanting.

There is some good news, however. U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Max Baucus (D-MT) introduced the Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act (S. 2747) two months ago that would permanently provide \$900 million annually to the LWCF. In addition, a provision within the House Resource Committee by Chairman Nick Rahall's (D-WV) Consolidated Land, Energy, and Aquatic Resources (CLEAR) Act (HR 3534) would also provide dedicated LWCF funding.

If these proposals move, the LWCF could continue to expand land acquisition at some of America's most famous and bird-filled federal locations, including national wildlife refuges, national parks, national forests, as well as increasing the size of various state and local parks.