

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

HJM 4012

Brief Description: Requesting Congress to pass legislation to restore and revitalize federal funding for the land and water conservation fund.

Sponsors: Representatives Regala, Eickmeyer, Buck, Clements, Anderson, Veloria and Conway.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Meeting Date: February 24, 1999.

Bill Analysis Prepared by: Carole Richmond, Analyst (786-7114)

Background: The Land and Water Conservation Fund was created in 1964 in order to fund land acquisition for the four principal federal land management agencies (the National Park Service, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management in the Department of Interior) and to provide matching funds to states for outdoor recreation projects. To be eligible for grant monies, states must identify their recreation needs through State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans.

Revenues for the fund are derived primarily from oil and gas leases on the Outer Continental Shelf, federal outdoor recreation user fees, the federal motorboat fuel tax, and surplus property sales. Congress has authorized an annual revenue stream of \$900 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, but the funds must be appropriated before they can be spent. If appropriations are not made, the revenues are spent on other programs.

The fund has never been fully funded, and annual appropriations have generally ranged from \$200 to \$300 million. Annual appropriations peaked in FY 1978 at \$806, after dropping to \$76 million in FY 1997. In recent years, no funding at all has gone to the state and local portion of the program.

Attempts have been made in the past to permanently appropriate the fund's revenues, rather than make them subject to annual congressional appropriations, but these have been unsuccessful to date. Several proposals have been introduced in the 106th Congress to provide permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Summary of Bill: Washington contains a wide range of outdoor recreational opportunities and many Washington residents are actively involved in outdoor recreation.

Outdoor recreation is also important to the state's economy. The state's population is one of the fastest growing in the United States and demand for outdoor recreation is rising.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has funded the acquisition of park land, water resources, wildlife habitat, open space, and the development of 37,000 state and local outdoor recreation projects. Washington and other states lack adequate funding for fish and wildlife protection and management, especially for species which are not hunted or fished.

Congress is petitioned to restore and revitalize federal funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and to create a new dedicated fund for state-level fish and wildlife management.