

Testimony of Kevin Boling
On behalf of the LWCF Coalition
In Support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
The Honorable Michael Simpson, Chairman
The Honorable James Moran, Ranking Member
March 21, 2012

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Moran, and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in the FY 2013 Interior Appropriations Bill. My name is Kevin Boling, I am a resident of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and owner of The Boling Company, a forestland investment company. I am pleased to be appearing today on behalf of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Coalition. The Coalition represents a broad array of groups and individuals across the country who value land conservation and outdoor recreation with members from ranging from business leaders to sportsmen to conservation organizations.

In a career spanning thirty years, I have had the great good fortune to combine a personal passion for the outdoors with a career in forest management, planning and investment. During the two decades that I managed Potlatch Corporation's logging and forestry operations, I became aware of the challenges for private landowners in the face of changing land use patterns and development pressures. Beginning in 2002, I managed extensive timberland investments for Forest Capital Partners and, later, oversaw the successful closing of land and conservation easements sales valued at \$87 million. I worked on several transactions funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund and experienced firsthand its importance in helping communities and landowners work together to maintain privately-owned working forests while protecting public values.

Like the esteemed Chairman, my Idaho roots run deep. My earliest memories are of summers spent in Fernwood and St. Maries with my grandfather, an Idaho logger. As a young and eager helper, I would sit next to him on his Cat, riding back and forth from the landing to the trees he had felled, jump off the Cat, grab the chokers and winch line and set the drag for him, jump back on the Cat and ride back down to the log landing. I think I was nine or ten the first summer I got to log with him. It turns out those early days sitting next to Granddad led to a long and rewarding forestry career. Moreover, it connected me to the forest community and the land ethic of the people whose lives are intertwined in that forest web. It is these connections that motivate me to appear before you today.

I appreciate this opportunity to advocate for The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), America's premier federal program to ensure that we all have access to the outdoors. Whether it is a local community park or playground, or the vast expanses of our federal public lands, Congress created the LWCF in 1964 to guarantee America's natural, historical and outdoor recreation heritage. In 1968, Congress had the wisdom to

authorize an income stream of \$900 million annually for LWCF from offshore oil and gas leasing revenues – not taxpayers’ dollars. With an average of over \$6 billion coming in from offshore leasing royalties annually (and significantly more expected in future years), \$900 million for the LWCF account is a reasonable conservation offset to offshore energy development. It only makes sense as we draw down some natural resources, that we reinvest a portion of the proceeds to conserve other natural resources.

LWCF is a time-tested program with remarkable range, reaching all Americans. Each of us has likely visited a local or state park, trail or fishing access site that has benefitted from it. In total, more than 40,000 LWCF state assistance grants have added value to every state and 98 percent of the counties across the country. Each year, millions of Americans as well as international tourists visit our national parks and forests, hunt, fish or bird watch at our national wildlife refuges, or hike along our national trails. Yet, few are aware of the added protection that the LWCF program provides to our public lands. From Gettysburg to Yosemite, and countless places in between, LWCF funding has protected our natural, cultural, historical and recreation legacy, preserving our uniquely American landscapes, stories and traditions.

Continued strategic LWCF investments in inholdings and conservation easements protects the asset that is our public lands, preventing incompatible development, creating management efficiencies, and enhancing access to outdoor recreation opportunities. During my tenure at Forest Capital, with the help of a conservation partner, we worked on the conveyance of 6,600 acres of Forest Capital timber holdings to the Siskiyou National Monument south of Medford, Oregon. This represented the best possible outcome to meet the management needs of the public agency, the financial considerations of Forest Capital, and the interests of the local community. From the vantage point of the private landowner, having a reasonable expectation that LWCF funding would be made available for the purchase was critical in our decision to invest time and manpower towards this conservation outcome at the Siskiyou.

Increasingly, LWCF funding is playing an important role in landscape scale protection. This doesn’t involve extensive federal purchases of land. Rather, open space, clean water and wildlife habitat can often be preserved by partnering with private landowners to sustain working landscapes and keep land on the tax rolls. Conservation easements purchases allow ranchers and farmers to remain responsible land stewards, as they have for generations. Today, LWCF funding is needed to protect working lands from the Everglades Headwaters to the Dakota Grasslands to the Rocky Mountain Front. These projects – stunning in scale and impact to local communities and traditional landscapes – are relatively small and strategic in terms of federal investment.

I know you understand this firsthand, Mr. Chairman. Thanks to your support, LWCF funding has contributed substantially to the conservation of working farms and ranches along the South Fork of the Snake River. Over the last decade and a half, a unique partnership of landowners, local communities, conservation partners, and federal agencies has resulted in the permanent protection of what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has dubbed one of our country’s most sensitive and unique natural areas. Today,

this continuous corridor of conservation easement-protected lands is keeping the ranching traditional alive. With 350 recreational visitor days per year along the South Fork Snake, it is also providing a major economic driver in East Idaho.

The Forest Legacy Program, funded under LWCF since 2004, has partnered with states and private landowners to protect over 2 million acres of working forests in 42 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Even during tough economic times, with presumably fewer private buyers out there, the reality is that these properties are still worth more to a second-home or subdivision developer than today's forest investor is willing or able to invest in them on a long-term basis. Through the purchase of development rights today, the timberland owner is no longer held hostage to future development considerations. They can focus on the full measure of long-term forest management opportunities and protect conservation values, while continuing to pay property taxes, produce logs for local mills and, importantly, preserve private sector jobs for rural communities.

One such example is the McArthur Lake Corridor in northern Idaho. Several years ago, while a manager at Forest Capital, I oversaw the conveyance of development rights over 3,943 acres utilizing Forest Legacy funding. An important wildlife travel corridor between the Bitterroot and Selkirk ranges, this ownership was already surrounded by considerable rural residential development, so preventing further development was critical. This year, the State of Idaho has requested a Forest Legacy Program grant of \$4 million to protect an additional 6,000 acres of working forests lands across the McArthur Lake Wildlife Corridor. Stimson Lumber Company, the landowner, is contributing over \$1 million in donated land value. Stimson will continue sustainable timber harvest operations of approximately 2.5 million board feet annually supporting about 33 full-time forest products jobs plus another 69 full-time in other related sectors of the economy. By guaranteeing public access to these lands in perpetuity, the easement will also help to support numerous local businesses that are part of Idaho's outdoor recreation economy – which statewide supports 37,000 jobs and accounts for over \$2 billion annually in retail sales and services. This is a win-win that maintains vital timber industry jobs and production while supporting the local tourism and recreation economy.

If we are serious about creating jobs and getting the economy back on track, conservation spending on LWCF is not only a wise, but an essential investment. Today, outdoor recreation and tourism represent a major part of the U.S. economy, one that America still dominates globally, and one that represents opportunities for sustained economic growth in rural and urban communities across America. A recent report from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation tells us that, together, outdoor recreation, natural resource preservation and historic preservation activities support 9.4 million jobs (1 out of every 15 jobs in the U.S.) and contributes \$1.06 trillion annually to our economy. The popularity and demand for opportunities to recreate on public lands will only increase as our population grows and these natural places increase in aesthetic and economic value.

I am an avid outdoorsman and my most treasured memories are of time spent in Idaho with family and friends, hunting and fishing, skiing and camping, and rafting our magnificent rivers. Across the country, LWCF purchases within federally-designated areas, as well as conservation easements across private lands, are protecting our most threatened waterfowl, trout and big-game habitat. These federal dollars often provide leverage for significant state, local and private investments in land protection as well. Furthermore, LWCF funding can play an increasingly important role in making public lands public by ensuring that sportsmen and other outdoor enthusiasts have access to favorite hunting grounds, trout streams, and trails. With changing land use and ownership patterns, historic recreational access is being cut off or blocked in many areas. Strategic LWCF purchases can defuse conflicts with private landowners by securing permanent access. Additionally, they serve to connect existing public lands and create expanded parking and trailhead access for the public. Conservation easement acquisitions through the Forest Legacy Program compensate private landowners who have often provided voluntary public access to lands, thereby ensuring permanent public access to prime hunting and fishing lands.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I join with the LWCF Coalition and many others across the nation in urging you to support funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This year, the Administration's budget request includes high-priority, now-or-never, willing seller projects across our national parks, wildlife refuges, forests and other public land. It makes investments in state-side LWCF grants including local parks and trails, and in non-federal protection of working forests, key wildlife habitat, and other irreplaceable outdoor resources. It also expands LWCF investments in landscape conservation, hunting and fishing access, civil war heritage sites, and national trails. These are priorities I think we can all agree upon.

We understand the severe financial constraints under which you and this Congress are operating. At the same time, we recognize that America simply cannot afford to lose the public opportunities that LWCF provides, or the activity it injects into the economy. It is a program that enables local communities and private landowners to make economically sound choices to protect the natural, cultural and recreation resources we all commonly share. I therefore respectfully ask that you support the Administration's FY 2013 recommendation of \$450 million for LWCF program. At one-half the authorized funding level for the program, this represents a measured proposal that spreads limited resources wisely across urgent and diverse LWCF priorities and programmatic goals.

In closing, I thank you for your dedication and service. I can think of no greater legacy for my three lovely granddaughters than the conservation of our traditional working landscapes, and the protection of our recreation lands, clean waters and wildlife heritage.

Kevin Boling
kevin@thebolingcompany.com
204 East Sherman Avenue
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814