



Roper Lake, Safford.



Slide Rock State Park, Sedona.

Healthy Parks, Healthy People

It's time to fully fund the Land & Water Conservation Fund.

A surge in visitors to public lands across Arizona during the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated just how much we crave the outdoors. With visitor numbers expected to remain high, we need to create more opportunities for outdoor recreation and better protect the ones we have. This means fully and permanently funding America's most important conservation program: the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Time outdoors is vital for our health

Staying indoors takes its toll on our mental and physical health. Research shows that time spent in nature reduces anxiety and depression, improves concentration and memory, and helps keep our immune systems healthy.

Park visitation has soared during the pandemic

The closure of many local playgrounds has contributed to parks and hiking trails across Arizona being inundated with visitors.

- Between April and May 2020, visitation at Arizona's state parks increased by 45 percent, compared to a 15 percent decrease during the same period last year.
- Many parks have seen packed trails and large crowds. In May, Lyman Lake in Apache County received 275 percent more visitors this year than last, Lake Havasu 83 percent more, Fool Hollow Lake in Navajo County 47 percent, Roper Lake in Graham County 39 percent, and Patagonia Lake, Santa Cruz County, 29 percent.



Lake Havasu State Park.



Hikers on the South Kaibab Trail, Grand Canyon National Park.

Access to the outdoors requires funding public lands

Surging demand for outdoor recreation during the pandemic reflects the public's desire for open spaces, while also placing new demands on public lands.

- Park staff have had to take on new responsibilities, including extra patrols and maintenance due to damage to parks from overuse during the pandemic.
- Parks have needed new infrastructure, including signage and parking, and the surge in visitors has forced some to temporarily close or limit access to popular trails.
- Parks have had to meet these demands with already inadequate funding. Arizona's national parks alone already have a maintenance funding shortfall of nearly \$600 million.

To expand outdoor access, fully fund the Land & Water Conservation Fund

The LWCF is America's most important federal funding program for public lands. The LWCF uses offshore drilling royalties to fund land purchases by the National Park Service and other federal agencies. It has also channeled billions of dollars into more than 41,000 state and local park projects, including hiking trails, bike paths, campgrounds and other outdoor facilities.

The LWCF is authorized to accrue \$900 million annually to make available for conservation projects. But Congress has historically siphoned off much of this money to fill budget holes elsewhere. In total, less than half of the \$40.9 billion accrued in the LWCF since 1965 has been used for the purposes for which it was intended. If the LWCF were to receive full funding, roughly twice as much money could flow toward protecting Arizona's vital outdoor areas.

The LWCF has protected some of Arizona's most treasured places

Many of the open spaces Arizonans enjoy have been protected with funding from the LWCF. More than \$243 million in LWCF grants have helped pay for the purchase and maintenance of public lands across Arizona, including:

- **ET Ranch.** \$480,000 in LWCF funding enabled a 600-acre land purchase that ensures permanent recreation access to the North Santa Teresa Wilderness Area in the Coronado National Forest.
- Millions of dollars in LWCF grants have funded land purchases in **Grand Canyon and Saguaro national parks** and **Lake Mead National Recreation Area**.
- \$2 million from the LWCF funded the acquisition of the historic **Packard Ranch**, ensuring permanent public access to the hiking trails of the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness, the Coconino National Forest and the Prescott National Forest.
- Almost 800 LWCF grants totaling over \$66 million have supported hundreds of **state and local park projects**, including land acquisitions and park development at Patagonia Lake and Lost Dutchman state parks.

Funding for parks supports our outdoor economy

The surge in demand for access to public lands can also help support Arizona's economic recovery. Outdoor recreation generates \$21.2 billion in consumer spending in Arizona, 201,000 jobs, and \$1.4 billion in state and local tax revenue every year.



FRONTIER GROUP

For more information visit:
environmentarizonacenter.org

Photo credits: Front, top to bottom: Arizona State Parks; via PxHere, CC0 Public Domain; Arizona State Parks; National Park Service via Flickr, CC BY 2.0.