

Clatsop Businesses ask Oregon's Senators to prioritize the Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund, established nearly 5 decades ago, brings tremendous benefit to outdoor recreational businesses up and down the coast. Touted as a measure to counter the degradation of offshore oil and gas drilling, the fund has had a limited but meaningful history here in Oregon. Originally envisioned to distribute \$900 million in funds annually to the procurement of essential fish and wildlife habitat as well as public access, congress, over the years, has dramatically ignored the purpose of these monies. Only funded to the tune of \$306 million for fiscal year 2014 for the entire nation, less than that in 2013, by the time it reaches our nations natural resource agencies, we're not getting what we bargained for.

Outdoor Business leaders will be present at Senator Ron Wyden's town hall on January 25th, beginning at 1:30 p.m. at the Maritime Museum. Senator Wyden is the chair of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, largely overseeing some of the nation's most influential legislation, especially on extractive activities and conservation measures.

Outdoor recreation is a multi-billion dollar a year industry here in Oregon. Clatsop County and the North Oregon Coast is the most highly utilized region in the state for outdoor recreation, responsible for nearly \$150 million annually in outdoor related expenditures. Local area fishing guide Jody Mather stated, "Without adequate fish and wildlife habitat, I'm out of a job. These critical wetlands and terrestrial areas in Clatsop County harbor ample numbers of waterfowl and grow food and provide refuge for our last remaining wild salmon and steelhead stocks." Mather guides over 100 days per year on the lower Columbia for sturgeon and salmon, accommodating customers from all over the country. "This fishery draws interest from around the world and we need to ensure that it remains intact, not just for our billion dollar a year industry, but for future outdoor enthusiasts that typically fund fish and wildlife conservation in our state."

It's not just local fishing operations that benefit from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The purchase of public access gets people outside and away from everyday distractions of the busy lives Oregonians live. Mountain biking forest trails as well as the rural areas of Clatsop County fuels another industry locally. Non-consumptive wildlife viewing contributes more to the local economy than fishing and hunting combined. Local area bike shop owner Scott Lee sees Clatsop County as rich grounds for his business. "With scores of biking opportunities, especially along Highway 101 and at Fort Steven's State Park, public access is critical to my customer base. Without ample trails and productive wildlife viewing, people have no reason to invest in the services I offer or the bounty our region affords." Lee has been in business for over 25 years and hopes that this eco-friendly type of recreation remains a mainstay in Clatsop County. "The relatively flat lands and sandy beaches make this a rich target area for folks that want to enjoy unprecedented opportunity for outdoor recreation. What's important to point out is that we've only scratched the surface of our potential. With the proper investment, we could offer so much more," Lee added.

The last time the Land and Water Conservation Fund was used for an acquisition in Clatsop County was nearly 25 years ago, when the Arcadia Beach Wayside was approved for \$33,375.00. Three separate acquisitions around 1970 secured the Jewell Meadows Elk Refuge for around

\$75,000.00. All six of Oregon's projects ended up on the cutting floor for 2014, none from the North Oregon Coast.

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