



July 16, 2020

The Honorable Paul Gosar, D.D.S.
United States House of Representatives
2057 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Gosar,

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the 3,069 counties, boroughs and parishes we represent, we write to you regarding upcoming floor action on H.R. 1957, the Great American Outdoors Act. **We urge Congress to adopt your amendment to ensure that no dollars from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) may be used to purchase private land within a county that is greater than 50 percent federally owned unless the agency also disposes of an equal amount of federal land within the impacted county.** This will help to ensure no net-loss of private, taxable land at a time when local governments already face increased budget strains due to the economic slowdown and pandemic response.

Counties serve as the gateway to all our public lands and work closely with federal land management agencies in resource and land access planning. However, federal land ownership can create burdens for local governments, including reduced property tax revenue from a decreased share of private land ownership within their jurisdictions. This is especially the case in rural counties throughout western states that in some cases are over 90 percent federally owned, which reduces their economic development potential and tax bases.

Therefore, as Congress moves forward with H.R. 1957, which would mandate permanent funding of the LWCF, counties ask Congress to amend the legislation to protect counties with more than 50 percent federal land by requiring the covered agency to dispose of an equally sized tract of land as that they wish to acquire. This would ensure federal agencies do not undercut the private tax base in rural communities but will also preserve local interest and involvement in land acquisition decisions. Counties support the LWCF program, including the 40 percent share dedicated to state and local governments for parks and other conservation needs, but support reforms to future federal land acquisitions financed by the LWCF.

County governments appreciate your attention to this critical issues for public lands counties. Local governments are impacted by federal land ownership in many ways, especially in reduced tax revenues. **Counties urge Congress to adopt your amendment to ensure future LWCF land acquisitions are coupled with equal reductions in federal land ownership in impacted counties where public lands make up more than 50 percent of their jurisdiction.**

Sincerely,

Matthew D. Chase
Executive Director and CEO
National Association of Counties