



Op-Ed: Conservation Helps Our Economy

By Bob Bugert; Gordie Romer; Jim Russell, Eliot Scull
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Listening to Congress these days, we are frequently offered a stark choice between conservation and economic prosperity. As business leaders and conservationists in Chelan and Douglas counties, we know that is a false choice.

In North Central Washington, we are blessed with a wonderful outdoor heritage. Many people live here for the natural beauty, open space, and unparalleled recreational access just outside city limits. Outdoor recreation has become a building block of our economy. Protecting our natural areas boosts our local economy by supporting local bait and tackle shops, outdoor retailers and the restaurants and shops that thrive on visitors drawn to the outdoors — it also improves our quality of life and makes North Central Washington an attractive place for talented people and businesses to locate.

In the past decade, a widening body of research has shown that amenities, such as clean water, a slower pace of life, low crime rates, scenery, recreational opportunities, or “quality of life” for short, are influencing peoples’ decision to live and to do business in rural areas. The Outdoor Industry Association estimates that recreation — hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing—contributes \$730 billion to the U.S. economy and supports 6.5 million jobs. In Washington state alone, outdoor recreation supports 115,000 jobs and contributes \$11.7 billion to the state economy. It also contributes \$8.5 billion in retail sales and generates \$650 million in annual state tax revenues. But poorly planned development pressures threaten quality habitat and public access to lands for hiking, hunting, fishing and wildlife watching.

That’s why we need the support of our elected officials to be able to conserve the parks, recreation areas, and wildlife habitat that boost our local economy. One of the more effective tools for conservation and the economy is the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This lesser-known fund has outsized impacts on Washington parks and trails. Established in 1965, the LWCF is premised on a sensible and simple idea: a small percentage of fees paid by offshore oil and gas drilling companies — not taxpayer dollars — should be used to improve recreational opportunities and protect exceptional lands and waters for public use.

In short, some of the money derived from allowing energy companies to extract our natural resources is reinvested in conserving other natural resources. This fund has helped protect places like Lake Wenatchee State Park, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and Wenatchee National Forest.

Rep. Dave Reichert has been a champion for the Land and Water Conservation Fund because he understands that we need to conserve our lands for the future — to give our kids and grandkids the opportunity to hike, hunt, fish, and enjoy the outdoors.

As the great conservationist Theodore Roosevelt said, “To waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them.” By working together, we can conserve our way of life for future generations.

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