

## Guest Editorial: Federal Fund Shifts Threaten Our State Recreation Projects

By Pat Lantz  
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Recent news that plans for completion of the Eddon Boat Waterfront Park in Gig Harbor have been put in jeopardy hit me hard.

You should be upset, too, even if you don't live in Gig Harbor.

Last month, Congress failed to include a critical bipartisan provision in the recently passed transportation bill that would have guaranteed robust funding for parks, trails, water access and recreational lands throughout the country – like Eddon Boat Waterfront Park.

The provision would have funded the Land and Water Conservation Fund – a lesser-known national program with outsize impacts on Washington's national and neighborhood parks and trails. Established in 1965, the program is the federal government's primary means to acquire and develop state, local and national parks, trails, wildlife habitat, and forests.

Close-to-home projects – at Mount Rainier National Park, the Pacific Crest Trail, Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, Point Defiance Park in Tacoma and Anderson Cove Waterfront Park in Bremerton – are in need of grants from the fund this year.

The fund doesn't even use taxpayer dollars. Instead, it uses a small percentage of the fees oil and gas companies pay for drilling in waters we all own offshore. It is premised on a sensible and simple idea: Use those fees to improve recreational opportunities and protect exceptional lands and waters for public use.

The oil and gas fees go into the equivalent of a cookie jar. But Congress consistently raids that cookie jar for purposes other than parks and outdoor recreation. The provision that Congress dropped from the transportation bill would have stopped Congress from raiding the program and guaranteed funding.

Fortunately, we have another bite at the apple. Congress can set aside Land and Water Conservation Fund money in the annual appropriations bill. But securing

that funding will be an uphill battle. The House Appropriations Committee's proposed federal funding bill cuts the contribution by 80 percent from last year.

A recent survey by bipartisan pollsters Lori Weigel and David Metz found 74 percent of American voters say even with federal budget problems, funding for conservation should not be cut.

Projects like the Eddon Boat Waterfront Park matter. Parks, trails, recreation areas and wilderness provide for our way of life, support small businesses in our state and raise our property values.

The Outdoor Industry Association estimates that activities – such as camping, boating, paddling, fishing, hiking, skiing and bicycling – contribute \$64.6 billion to the U.S. economy and support 6.5 million jobs.

In Washington alone, outdoor recreation supports 115,000 jobs and contributes \$11.7 billion to the economy. The economic benefits by themselves justify this program.

In my many years as a state lawmaker I consistently supported investments in our state's recreation, conservation and cultural assets because I knew how big the return was. Congress failed to see the obvious. Omitting the important provision from the transportation bill cost us investment opportunities with a big local payoff.

Luckily, we have strong bipartisan leaders for conservation and recreation funding in Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, and Reps. Norm Dicks, Adam Smith and Dave Reichert. Each of them vigorously championed the conservation funding and guarantees in the transportation bill. Now they can help us find another way to pay for this valuable program.

Please join me in thanking them for their support and asking that they continue to work on a solution to make sure the Land and Water Conservation Fund gets consistent reliable funding that we can put to work in our communities.

Pat Lantz of Gig Harbor, a former state representative, is a member of the State Parks and Recreation Commission.