

## Fifty Years of Funding Outdoor Recreation

By Craig Whipple, Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation

Fifty years ago, a new federal law changed the landscape of local, state and federal parks and outdoor recreation spaces across the United States... forever. Those involved in managing public parks are intimately familiar with its programs. Most others do not know of it directly. But millions of people have enriched their lives by playing, relaxing, and exploring outdoor places protected with its help. The law, called the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF), has provided funds to almost every state and local public park across the country.

LWCF has now granted more than \$48 million in projects and protected 27,000 acres of land for outdoor recreation in Vermont alone.

Nationwide, more than \$3 billion in LWCF grants to states has leveraged more than \$7 billion in nonfederal matching funds. Until September 2015, program



*From playgrounds to picnic spots, LWCF grants support outdoor recreation of all kinds.*

funds came from a wide base of federal recreation fees, Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) revenues from leasing oil and gas sites in coastal waters, federal surplus real property sales, and a portion of federal motorboat fuel taxes. This year, the entire LWCF program is up for reauthorization in Congress, causing outcries in the news and social media from those who fear that federal funding for outdoor recreation has dried up.

Although the September 30<sup>th</sup> deadline has passed, there is still funding available for the program. Bipartisan support is building for reauthorization, and all of Vermont's delegates are backing the program. On October 1, members of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation met with Joel Lynch, chief of the State

and Local Assistance Program Division of the National Park Service, at the Vermont Conference on Recreation at the Lake Morey Resort. There, Lynch provided a reassuring update, explaining that the Senate has already approved straight reauthorization of the bill and a modified program bill is expected soon from the House Natural Resources Committee.

Vermonters, then, may continue to feel the effects of the longstanding funding. "The impact of this program in Vermont has been huge," says Jessica Savage, Recreation Coordinator and LWCF Grant Administrator. "Hundreds of parks and facilities have been acquired and improved with LWCF funds over the past fifty years, likely in your community or a neighboring community."

LWCF provides 50-50, reimbursement-based grants to eligible applicants that include cities, towns, villages, school districts, fire districts and inter-municipal districts are eligible applicants. Projects can range from the acquisition of land made available for public recreation to development projects including sport playfields, hiking, biking and walking trails, camping, picnic facilities, swimming areas, and playground areas. Funds are apportioned to federal agencies, and to the 50 states and 6 territories through the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service (NPS). In Vermont, LWCF is administered by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation. These funds are available on a regular basis to municipalities around the state to conserve lands and develop infrastructure dedicated to outdoor recreation.

For more information on LWCF in Vermont, visit:

<http://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/grants/lwcf>.