



Budget Fight Endangers Conservation Funding & Incentives

The federal government now faces a severe budget crisis, far larger in scale and impact than those that many state governments have faced over the past three years. Solutions that were unthinkable a few years ago are now on the table, including major changes to Medicare and Social Security. The House of Representatives passed a budget that would reduce natural resources spending by an incredible 46% over the next 10 years. The President has proposed cutting the charitable tax deductions higher-income Americans can take.

Longtime supporters in Congress tell us we're in real danger of major reductions in programs and benefits we have previously taken for granted in our conservation work. Our best defense is to be a constant presence in the offices and inboxes of friend and foe alike, showing them the real benefits of your conservation work in their districts and the public's strong support for that work. We all need to make the case that natural resource programs are important investments that should not be disproportionately cut as the budget is trimmed.



The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction failed to reach an agreement, triggering automatic cuts in 2013

Small Victories Amidst a Wave of Cuts

With passage of the Budget Control Act, Congress agreed on a process to cut more than \$2 trillion from projected deficits over the next ten years. Its two rounds of deficit reduction will place extraordinary pressure on government funding and tax incentives for conservation:

- The first round imposes \$917 billion in discretionary spending cuts over the next decade. The Appropriations committees will have to decide where those cuts are made and **your advocacy can help keep important conservation programs off the chopping block.**
- The “super-committee” charged with cutting another \$1.2 - 1.5 trillion failed to reach an agreement, triggering a “sequestration” process – automatic, across-the-board-cuts starting in 2013. Fortunately, these cuts won't disproportionately target conservation.

This spring, House appropriators singled out conservation programs for even more severe cuts than those mandated by the debt limit agreement. Popular conservation programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Forest Legacy and the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund would face 80-96% cuts, and even Farm Bill programs like the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and Grassland Reserve Program would be cut back.

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Fortunately, the combined efforts of land trusts, sportsmen's organizations, and other conservationists are having a real impact:

- The House approved three amendments that together restored \$29 million to LWCF and Forest Legacy, while defeating several that would have eliminated them entirely.
- Sportsmen's Caucus members forced a retreat from an earlier proposal to eliminate funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and State Wildlife Grants.
- Working with the LWCF Coalition, America's Voice for Conservation, Recreation and Preservation coalition, and others, we secured surprisingly strong funding for conservation programs in the 2012 appropriations package, including a modest increase for LWCF.

Charitable Tax Deduction at Risk!

Big federal deficits have also driven proposals to limit the deductibility of charitable contributions. President Obama's jobs bill proposed a cap on itemized deductions that could reduce contributions by an estimated \$7 billion per year, according to Independent Sector, a national association of nonprofits with whom the Alliance is working closely on this issue. Fortunately, the Senate rejected this proposal, but it could re-emerge. Defend the charitable deduction by adding your name to a sign-on letter and find other sample materials at: www.independentsector.org/charitable_deduction

Tips and Talking Points to Engage Congress

In this challenging environment, it's more important than ever to be sure your Members of Congress know how the federal programs and charitable giving incentives you use support the public interest in your community. The next few months are a critical window to show them that the places you conserve aren't "wasteful government spending" or "tax loopholes."

In a time of crisis, letters and emails alone aren't enough to make an impact. It is a time in which you will have wished you'd taken the time to build relationships with your Representatives and Senators and their staff. If you haven't, start now. The federal government's budget crisis is a long-term problem, and your elected officials will be facing tough budget choices for years to come. Invite them to a conserved property and introduce them to the agricultural producers or recreational outfitters whose jobs that land supports, and to local officials who support your work. Visit www.lta.org/policy/advocacy-tips for ideas.

Local examples of how conservation is critical to your local economy and quality of life are going to be far more important to your elected officials than any national figures. Please emphasize the programs that are important to you, but here are some general talking points:

- We share your concern for the nation's fiscal health and conservation programs should not be exempt from scrutiny, but spending on land, water, ocean and wildlife programs comprises just 1.26% of the federal budget and has grown only 2% over the last 30 years. Disproportionate cuts to investments in conservation will permanently harm our natural heritage and the economy, without substantially improving the fiscal picture.
- Approximately 60 percent of fish and wildlife in the United States reside on private farm, ranch and forest lands making their protection critical to the hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation activities that contribute a total of \$730 billion annually to the economy, supporting 6.5 million jobs (1 of every 20 jobs in the U.S.) and stimulating 8% of all consumer spending, according to the Outdoor Industry Foundation.

Please share your examples of economic benefits and other outreach materials by emailing policy@lta.org. For the latest updates on the federal budget situation and tips for engaging Congress, subscribe to our Advocates alerts at: www.lta.org/advocates.