Conservation Funding and Working with Congress: Using the Best Science and Economics to Support our Environment

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The Wilderness Society

- Founded in 1935
- Wildlands designation and responsible renewable energy development
- 150 staff nationwide
- Ecologists, grassroots organizers, economists, land planners, advocates
- My specific work
Case Studies

- Antiquities Act Defense
- The Land and Water Conservation Fund
Case Study I - Antiquities Act Defense

- What is the Antiquities Act?
- Why is it under attack?
- Why we have to defend it
- Mechanics of HR 1459
- How we worked the vote
- Outcomes/lessons learned/next steps
What is the Antiquities Act

• 1906 law by President Theodore Roosevelt
• 137 National Monuments created
• Many later become Parks – Grand Canyon, Zion, Acadia, Olympic
• Designed to allow the President to act when Congress does not protect crown jewels of our nation
• Used sparingly but effectively to create Monuments that are economically stimulative and environmentally prudent
Why is it under attack?

- Seen by some as a Presidential overreach
- Seen as being done against the wishes of the local community
- Should be subject to Congressional approval
- Law is 100 years old and needs updating
- Argument is that land which is developed or leased for fossil fuel extraction is more profitable than protecting that place
- President Obama has named 10 monuments and is likely to name more in the next three years
Why we have to defend it

- The last two Congresses have been the worst ever for Wilderness in history
- Presidential proclamation is one of the only ways we can protect special places
- Bedrock environmental law that has paid huge dividends
- Need this authority as an incentive for Congress to act
Mechanics of HR 1459

• House this week brought up Rep. Bishop’s bill – HR 1459 for a vote
• Would enforce the NEPA process on monument designations
• Would only allow one monument per state per Presidential four year term
• Would mandate that Congress uphold any monuments designations by the President within three years or the monument reverts back to its previous status
How We Worked The Vote

- Timeline of the week
- Catering the message
- Surrogates
- Media hits
- Phone banking
- Electoral pressure
Timeline of the week

• Knew on 3/20 that HR 1459 would be voted on
• Bill went to House Rules Committee this past Tuesday – amendments and terms of engagement
• Floor speeches and general debate on Wednesday afternoon
• Votes on amendments and final passage Wednesday early evening
Catering The Message

- 250 House offices to reach out to
- Some urban, some rural, some affluent, some poor, some western, some eastern
- Each office needed a different message and talking points
- Other side was working these members as well with their message
- Election year politics – who’s in a tough race?
Using surrogates

• Frequently the environmental community isn’t the best messenger, so we use:
  • Sportsmen
  • Veterans
  • Rights groups
  • Latino and African American groups
  • State and local elected officials
  • Chambers of Commerce and tourism boards
Media Hits

- Op Eds and LTEs around the country
  - Ted Roosevelt IV
  - Former Secretaries of Interior
  - Ed Boards
  - Conservation Leaders
- Getting news in specific papers where we knew we had swing votes
Congressman Rob Bishop moves to change the law which led to the National Parks.
Phone banking

- 15 critical swing votes were phone banked
- People from your district calling you to vote the right way
- Deluge an office
- Had to strategically place resources
Electoral Pressure

• Donors and politically connected advocates calling offices
• League of Conservation Voters and other groups threatening to score the vote
• Ads being run urging voters to watch how the member will vote
• Urging opponents in primaries and general elections this fall to use this vote as fodder
Member Example #1

- **Representative Dave Reichert (R-WA)**
  - Has public lands in his district
  - Moderate Republican willing to buck party
  - Has bills pending in House Nat Resources Committee
  - We used surrogates, media hits, local economic data, GIS mapping, and polls to secure his vote
  - Ultimately he took courageous vote against his party to uphold the Antiquities Act
  - Will be thanked publicly and receive electoral support
Member Example #2

- Representative David Joyce (R-OH)
  - Has no public lands in his district
  - Conservative Republican willing who likes to hunt, fish and recreate outdoors – supports Great Lakes restoration funding
  - We used surrogates (sportsmen), media hits, local economic data, demographics
  - Ultimately he stood with the party to restrict the Antiquities Act
  - Will see negative press and his opponent this fall will receive electoral support
Final Outcome

- HR 1459 passed by a vote of 222-201
- 10 Republicans opposed, 3 Democrats supported
- Ultimately there were only 20-25 true swing votes
- Lobby efforts on both sides were significant
- Promises were made to wavering House Republicans to stick with the party vote
- Half of them still bucked the party
- We learned valuable lessons about what are the most compelling arguments to use with certain offices
- Symbolic vote because the Senate will not move
Lessons Learned

• We need better economic data in many Republicans districts
• We need better ecological data on endangered species, migratory patterns, and visitation to public lands
• We need more diverse voices willing to speak out
• We need a culture in Washington that isn’t fearful of vote retribution
• Ultimately we are stronger for going through this vote, but at what cost?
Case Study II

- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
  - What is the program?
  - Tale of two narratives
  - Budget chaos
  - Building support
  - Outlook for the future
  - Lessons learned
What is LWCF?

• Strategic land acquisition program
  • Adds key acres to state parks, national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, BLM lands, battlefields
  • Connects trails systems and creates recreational access
  • State grants program provides local parks and outdoor recreation infrastructure
  • Provides flexibility to land owners wanting to conserve land
    • Easements to save working forests, ranches, farming way of life
What is LWCF?

- Funded by fees paid to federal government from oil/gas industry
  - Not even taxpayer dollars
- Created in 1960s by Kennedy/Johnson
- An asset for an asset
- Supposed to get $900 million per year
- Chronically underfunded by Congress
- Conservation $ lost = $17 billion
- Still many success stories
Tale Of Two Narratives

- Small minority of Republicans say we can’t afford LWCF
  - Takes land away from private citizens
  - Federal government intrusion
  - We don’t need more public lands
  - Should drill or develop instead
    - Bad economic choice
- That small minority is influential enough to stop funding increases for LWCF
Tale Of Two Narratives

- Vast majority of Republicans and Democrats support LWCF
  - Good investment in local communities
  - Helps make ecosystems/wildlife healthy
  - Provides access for hunting/fishing and other outdoor pursuits
  - Creates sustainable, livable communities
  - Saves $ down the road
  - Protects clean water resources
LWCF Budget Chaos

- Land and Water Conservation Fund
  - 2012 President’s Request: $900 million
  - 2012 House Proposed Level: $90 million
  - 2012 Senate Proposed Level: $350 million
  - **2012 Final Funding Level: $322 million**
  - 2013 President’s Request: $450 million
  - 2013 House Proposed Level: $66 million
  - 2013 Senate Proposed Level: $370 million
  - **2013 Final Funding Level: $305 million**
  - 2014 Presidential Request: $600 million
  - 2014 House Proposed Level: $0
  - 2014 Senate Proposed Level: $350 million
  - **2014 Final Funding Level: $300 million**
Building Support For LWCF

• Inside the Beltway
• In District/Local Communities
• Tools/Strategies
• Pulling It All Together
Author legislation – S. 338
  - Add co-sponsors; build champions

Dear Colleague letters
  - Member to member outreach

Utilize DC Media market
  - Where obscure issues get more attention

Work the budget process

Fend off attacks – amendments

Briefings/Fly-ins

Traditional Lobbying
S. 338 – LWCF Authorization and Funding Act of 2013

- Bill provides full funding for LWCF at $900 million annually
- Organizing tool to build support
- Likely will never get voted on specifically
- Could be included in much larger legislation
- 40 Senate co-sponsors and counting
- Led by Walsh (D-MT) and Burr (R-NC)
- Momentum builds for action as members join
Administration/White House

- Push President’s Budget to support LWCF
- Enlist Department of Interior to advocate for their own program
- Get latest information about projects and opportunities from NPS/FWS/USFS/BLM
- Ensure that LWCF is part of the President’s conservation legacy
- Get Administration officials on the ground
In District/Local Communities

- State fact sheets – It’s about place
- Individual project stories
- Success stories – invite decision makers to events
- Missed opportunities
- State letters
- Local press
- Polling
Tools/Strategies

- Website: LWCFCoalition.org
- Social media
- Videos
- Utilization of different voices
  - Hunters/Ranchers/Farmers/State-local officials
- Economic reports
  - Outdoor Industry Association
  - Headwaters Economics
  - Sonoran Institute
  - Other commissioned studies
Outlook For The Future

- Support continues to build for LWCF
- Funding levels staying flat
  - No small feat
- Biding our time for the right political opportunity
- Fighting off attempts to weaken the program in amendments or other bills
- Pushing the White House/President to get more engaged
  - Second term gives you hope
- Positioned well for success
Lessons Learned/Conclusion

- Patience is a virtue
- Incremental gains must be celebrated
- Build the foundation of support over time
- Never miss an opportunity to highlight priorities
- Slowly marginalize your opposition in DC and at home
- Never let your guard down
- Every bill is an opportunity but also a threat
- Wait for perfect moment to push positive outcome
Keeping In Touch

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