Conservation Funding and Working with Congress

Alan Rowsome, Director of Conservation Funding
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

• Broad - Federal Budget Process

• Specific - The Land and Water Conservation Fund
2014 Federal Budget Process

- Ryan House Budget
- Murray Senate Budget
- President’s Budget
- Getting One Amendment Passed
- Implications For The Year
Ryan Budget

- House blueprint is incredibly austere
- Spending cuts, not revenue raisers
- Repeals Affordable Care Act
- Slashes funding for conservation
  - Climate science, R & D, operations and maintenance of land management agencies, EPA, DOE
  - Only funding increases came for permitting more oil and gas development
Ryan Budget

- Rammed through House Budget Committee and House Floor in less than two weeks
- Very few amendments allowed – Democrats not included in the process
- House Republican leadership demanded that their caucus support it
- To make money, the bill:
  - Sells federal land
  - Permits Keystone XL Pipeline
  - Allows for drilling in the Arctic
Murray Budget

- First Senate Budget since 2009
- Balanced approach that includes spending cuts and revenue raisers
- Strong conservation investments:
  - Public lands
  - Renewable Energy R & D
  - EPA Support
  - Climate Change
- Budget makes clear that conservation is not just smart environmentally, it’s also a job creator and economic stimulator
Murray Budget

- Pushed through Senate Budget Committee in one afternoon
- Hit Senate floor a week later
- 50 hours of debate and unlimited amendments – 500 filed
- ‘Vote-A-Rama’ ran for 14 hours straight
- Final vote at 5 am on a Saturday – bill passed by 50-49
- Moderate Democrats were the story
Murray Budget

• Amendments agreed to that would:
  • Permit the Keystone XL Pipeline
  • Limit Endangered Species Act
  • Ensure that states can meet GHG Standards
  • Increase wildfire funding
  • Increase renewable energy tax credits
President’s Budget

- Normally released in early February
- Sequester, fiscal cliff and other budget deadlines pushed it back
- Now scheduled to be released April 10
- Will be strong on conservation/environment
- Too late to influence House/Senate budget process
- Also too late to influence member requests for funding in the House
- Challenge since no earmarks are allowed
Getting One Amendment Passed

- Got draft of Senate budget on 3/13
- Analyzed it for any deficiencies in environmental support
- Noticed that it could have been stronger on wildfire funding account
- Critical need because a ‘hot’ fire season will gut the budget of the U.S. Forest Service
  - Climate change has been bringing drought and warm weather
- Implications not good for other forest priorities
- Decided on 3/14 that we might need an amendment to plus up fire funding
Getting One Amendment Passed

- Which Senators are likely to help?
  - Ideally at least one D and one R
- Who is smart politically/regionally to ask?
- Who has expressed interest before?
- Shop them amendment language
- Tell budget committee and Senate leadership of your intentions
- Officially file amendment once the committee opens up for debate
- Make sure it is ruled in order and germane
Create a deficit neutral reserve fund to help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, which threaten communities, homes, water supplies, utility infrastructure and natural resources, by adding $100 million for wildfire suppression activities.
Amendment Success

• Bipartisan leads were key
  • Politically different champs
• Senate leadership agreed we needed to address wildfire
• Found agreement with Republicans on Budget committee to give this a vote
• In the end, with both parties agreeing, the amendment passed by voice vote
• Important victory for the rest of budget season
Implications for the Year

- Better fire funding will ensure that the Forest Service can keep communities safe
- Won’t have to “rob Peter to pay Paul” to do it
- Means more responsible thinning of forests can be done to reduce fire risk
- Makes for a healthier forest

Obstacles remain, however:
- Senate budget has fire increase, House budget does not
- Could still have to fight in the appropriations process this year for it
- Even a bipartisan issue like this faces difficulty, but doable
What We Learned

- Must have bipartisan support to move amendments
- Economics mattered – firefighting is costly and hard to predict
- Major wildfires hurt:
  - Tourism economy
  - Local businesses/homes
  - Wildlife/Ecosystems
- Even with a very difficult budget outlook, you can get a funding increase if you work for it
- You must be dogged and determined to push it through the budget process
Case Study II - Specific

• 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
  • 2011 House Proposed Level : $59 million
  • 2011 Senate Proposed Level : $375 million
  • 2011 Final Funding Level : $301 million
  • 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
Building Support For LWCF

- Inside the Beltway
- In District/Local Communities
- Tools/Strategies
- Pulling It All Together
Inside the Beltway

- 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
- 27 Senate co-sponsors and counting
- Led by Baucus (D-MT) and Burr (R-NC)
- Momentum builds for action as members join
• 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
- Sequester impacts
- Success stories – invite decision makers to events
- 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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