

Conservation Fund should be funded

Less than an hour's drive from downtown Greenville are two extraordinary places — Jones Gap State Park and Caesar's Head State Park. With more than 10,000 acres in the heart of the Blue Ridge Escarpment, the parks are spectacularly beautiful and afford an amazing array of nature-based opportunities for all of us to enjoy.

But most of us take these two parks — and all of our natural areas — for granted. We rarely think about the hard work, leadership and funding required to make these special, ecologically significant places a reality. The fact is that without grants provided by the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Jones Gap and Caesars Head — and other public parks and natural areas — would not exist.

This is why a bill pending in Congress (H. 3534) is so important. The LWCF was established in 1964, but it has been fully funded only two times in its history. This legislation would guarantee full funding for the LWCF at \$900 million a year beginning in fiscal year 2011. The bill recently was approved by the House Natural Resources Committee and

soon will be considered by the full House. Similar legislation is expected to be introduced in the Senate shortly.

We applaud members of the South Carolina delegation who have been longtime champions of the LWCF. We urge all members of the delegation to make full funding of the LWCF one of their top legislative priorities. Please contact your representatives in Washington to express your strong support for this great program.

South Carolina is one of the smallest states, yet our population is increasing at the astonishing rate of 127 people every day. By 2035, there will be another 1.1 million people living here. This rapid growth leaves vulnerable the natural resources and beautiful scenic landscapes that provide an estimated \$55 billion in economic benefits to our state each year. We need to protect them before it is too late. State and local programs cannot do it alone. We need the LWCF at full strength.

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Greenville News

7/28/10