

FROM THE GROUND UP

Land and Water Conservation Fund-amentals for Tribes: Terminology & Tools

Definitions:

EXPLORE Act	Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act. Enacted in 2025 to expand outdoor recreation on public lands and waters and support rural economies and communities. The EXPLORE Act authorized the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP – see below) which among other things added Tribes, Alaska Native communities, and Native Hawaiian communities as eligible applicants to receive Land and Water Conservation Funds.
FLP	Forest Legacy Program. Administered by the Forest Service (USFS) in partnership with state agencies to encourage the protection of privately owned forest lands through conservation easements or land purchases, Tribal partnerships, and small forest projects.
GAOA	Great American Outdoors Act. Enacted in 2020, a key provision of the GAOA was the permanent and full funding of the LWCF at a minimum of \$900M annually. In addition to the LWCF, the GAOA also established the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund to address the maintenance backlog on public lands.
LWCF	Land and Water Conservation Fund. Enacted in 1964 to help preserve, develop, and ensure access to natural and recreation resources for future generations. It is not funded by taxpayer money, but primarily by royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling.
OPSP	Open Project Selection Process. National Park Service (NPS) requires each state to develop an Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) by which LWCF grant project proposals are prioritized and recommended for funding. These criteria and standards are used in the evaluation and selection of grant applications submitted by local units of government to the state.
ORLP	Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership. A competitive grant program funded through LWCF. The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program is a separate and complementary grant program to the State-side formula grants program*. Projects focus on improving recreation opportunities for economically disadvantaged communities that are under-served in terms of parks and other outdoor recreation resources. With passage of the EXPLORE Act, Tribes and eligible organizations may apply directly for ORLP funds which represents ~\$125 million annual share of LWCF. Direct eligibility does not extend to the LWCF State Side program as a whole.
SCORP	Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. Required document for states to receive funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The SCORP outlines a state's recreation needs and priorities, which then guides how LWCF funds are distributed for projects like parks, trails, and ball fields. To access LWCF funds, a state must create and maintain a SCORP that is approved by the National Park Service (NPS).

Notes:

	<p>The LWCF program is divided into the "<u>State Side</u>" which provides grants to State and local governments, and the "<u>Federal Side</u>" which is used to acquire lands, waters, and interests therein necessary to achieve the natural, cultural, wildlife, and recreation management objectives of federal land management agencies.</p>
	<p>LWCF State-side: formula grants are apportioned to each State, Territory, and Washington, D.C., based on a formula in the Act. Each State is responsible for administering competitions, selecting projects, and then submitting project applications to NPS for review and final decision on award.</p>
	<p>LWCF Federal Side: Land Acquisition Programs are used by BLM, NPS, and FWS to support individual land and water acquisition projects from willing sellers. Each bureau has a defined project selection process and criteria. Tribes can collaborate with agencies to support Federal land acquisition projects funded by LWCF.</p>

