

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

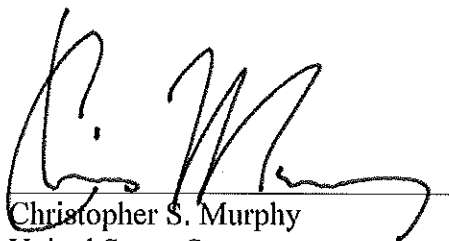
Dear Secretary Zinke:

We know you are a strong supporter of public lands and of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and that you have significant experience with these programs in the West. We want to highlight the importance of LWCF projects in the Northeast for preserving the fast-disappearing remaining natural areas in our region for hiking, fishing, and other recreation. As elected representatives of the four states encompassing the boundaries of the Connecticut River Watershed and the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, we write to urge the Department to prioritize funding for LWCF projects on the Refuge in the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request.

We strongly feel that Conte's low ranking on the Fish and Wildlife Service project list in past years is mismatched relative to the merits of its backlogged projects and the extraordinary multiplier effect of federal investment in the Refuge. Because of the many local, state, and federal partnerships in this watershed, the Conte Refuge presents a unique opportunity to leverage additional non-federal funding. Moreover, members of the land trust community from throughout the basin routinely assist the Refuge in identifying properties and working with landowners towards federal ownership, lowering staff time and costs to the Service. These land trusts also have added a combined total of more than 350,000 acres to the conservation estate basin-wide, providing recreational opportunities to the more than 2.3 million people who live in the basin and another 70 million who live within a day's drive of these properties. The ranking of the Conte Refuge should also appropriately reflect the needs of the Refuge and its long backlog of projects. The Fish and Wildlife Service staff and the non-governmental partner groups that comprise the Friends of Conte have identified over \$14 million in projects that need funding within the Refuge.

While we continue to work for full funding for LWCF, we urge you to give appropriate priority to the Conte Refuge as you prepare the FY18 project list. We also urge you to include a request for full funding for LWCF in the Department's FY18 Budget Request. Thank you for your consideration.

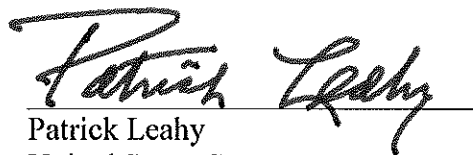
Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



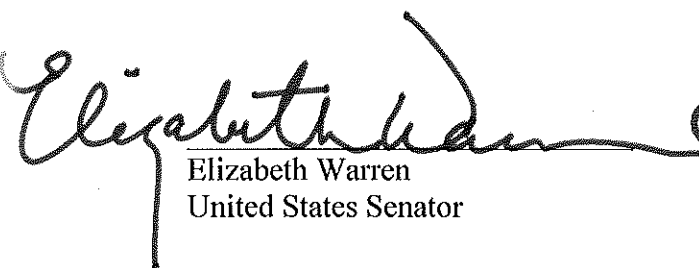
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



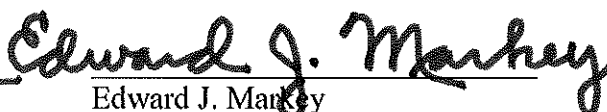
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Jim Kurth
Acting Director
Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503