



## Update on LCC FY16 Budget Situation

19 August 2015

- President Obama's FY16 request included an increase of nearly \$8 million for LCC funding in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) budget.
- The House and Senate Appropriations Committees did not accept the President's request. Instead, they proposed to cut the Service's portion of LCC funding to approximately half of the FY15 levels. The House mark was \$5,259,000 for LCC Adaptive Science and \$6,994,000 for Cooperative Landscape Conservation (FY15 is \$10,517,000 and \$13,988,000, respectively). The Senate mark was only slightly higher (\$5,724,000 and \$7,344,000).
- The House Committee has the perception that there is a lack of support for some LCCs by some States and Tribes, and directed the Service to focus remaining LCC dollars where partnerships are strongest.
- In a standard budget year, differences in the House and Senate bills are resolved in a "conference" between the two chambers and then a final bill is provided to the White House for signature or veto before the new fiscal year begins on October 1st. In recent years, this standard process has not occurred.
- Last year, Congress passed "continuing resolutions" maintaining prior year funding levels until an overarching budget agreement or "Omnibus" could be reached between Congress and the White House in December.
- This year again, Congress is behind schedule on FY16 appropriations bills. The most likely scenario now is that the Federal government will operate under a continuing resolution until late in the calendar year. At that point, Congress could extend the continuing resolution for a longer period of time, pass an Omnibus like last year, or pass individual spending bills.
- As a result, we still have a high degree of uncertainty and will not know the Service's budget for LCCs for some time. Although there are several steps remaining before the Service's actual FY16 budget for LCCs is known, we believe it is important to consider potential reductions should they should come to pass.
- In the event of budget decreases approaching 50 percent, the Service would not be able to provide our current level of investment to any LCC. The overall impact would be that all LCCs would experience reductions, some more significant than others.

- Our overarching goal is to secure the level of funding and other resources needed to support the long-term viability of the LCC Network and, ultimately, advance the Network vision of landscapes and seascapes capable of sustaining natural and cultural resources.
- It has been five years since LCCs were initiated and they have been successful at enabling partnership-based, large landscape conservation success within and among individual LCCs. This five-year milestone, combined with the potential FY16 budget scenario, offers the entire LCC Network an occasion to reflect upon the Network's strengths and thoughtfully address weaknesses to build on the accomplishments of these extraordinary partnerships.
- We encourage all partners in the LCC Network, including LCC Steering Committees and the LCC Council, to discuss their collective progress to date, identify areas for continued improvement, and consider how to improve perceptions about State and Tribal support for LCCs.
- In addition, the Service expects to receive the National Academy of Sciences' report on LCCs in the fall, which will further help each agency and organization engaged in the LCC enterprise to take stock of progress and consider improvements to the LCC Network over time.
- We also encourage the LCC Coordinators to explain the current budget situation to LCC partners and how potential reductions could affect their LCC. It is important that LCC staff continue to be transparent with partners about the full scope of potential impacts.
- Federal staff can explain the facts about the budget process and the current situation, and the implications of the proposed reductions to non-Federal partners. Federally funded staff cannot ask or encourage people to contact Congress on behalf of the LCC budget. However, this is an opportunity to continue to demonstrate the value of LCCs and highlight the participation and commitment of LCC partners.
- The Service remains committed to an open and transparent process as options are weighed on how to respond to a new budget. The highest levels of Service leadership will be engaged in this process, and we will provide regular updates as the budget situation is resolved for FY16.