

How to Follow a Proposed Bill

Let's start with an example. A bill that passed into law last fall was decades in the making--the "Great American Outdoors Act" (GAOA). It is a good example of how well advocacy works. (Click here to read the GCA article about it:

<https://www.gcamerica.org/members:news/get?id=2980>).

Linda Bilmes, a Harvard public policy professor, described it as "the biggest land conservation legislation in a generation." The National Parks Conservation Association, the leading advocacy organization for the parks, proclaimed it as "a conservationist's dream."

The legislation has two main impacts. **First, it establishes a National Park and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund that will provide up to \$9 billion over the next five years to fix deferred maintenance at national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, and other federal lands, with \$6.5 billion earmarked specifically to the 419 national park units.**

This funding is needed badly. **The number of visitors to the national parks system has increased by 50 percent since 1980, but the parks' budget has remained effectively flat.** This imbalance has led to a \$12 billion backlog of maintenance to repair roads, trails, campgrounds, monuments, fire safety, utilities, and visitor infrastructure — which will finally be addressed.

Second, the GAOA guarantees \$900 million per year in perpetuity for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a flagship conservation program paid for by royalty payments from offshore oil and gas drilling in federal waters. The LWCF was established in 1964 with an authorization level of \$900m, but in most years Congress has appropriated less than half of this amount.

The LWCF is especially important because it helps fund the four main federal land programs (National Parks, National Forests, Fish and Wildlife, and Bureau of Land Management) and provides grants to state and local governments to acquire land for recreation and conservation.

This sort of legislation takes a monumental, collaborative, and bipartisan effort and years to establish as law.

If you want to follow a bill as it moves through the legislative process, use the Library of Congress website: [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov) or the non-governmental resource:

<https://www.govtrack.us>

To demonstrate, let's look at another example. There are many other deserving conservation bills such as the "Recovering America's Wildlife Act" (RAWA or H.R. 3742), which did not become a law last year.

As you have learned, each bill is given a number and an identification as originating in the House of Representatives or the Senate. RAWA originated in the House of Representatives so it has the identification letters "H.R." Click this Library of Congress link to learn about the RAWA or H.R. 3742.: [HR3742 - 116th Congress \(2019-2020\): Recovering America's Wildlife Act of 2019 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)



This bill focused on funding needed for management of fish and wildlife species of the greatest conservation need. The National Wildlife Federation advocates for RAWA:

One-third of all U.S. wildlife species are already imperiled or are vulnerable—and nearly one million species worldwide are at risk of extinction. Habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, disease, and severe weather have all taken a severe toll on birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies, and bees. All types of wildlife are declining—in many cases dramatically.

If we are serious about saving thousands of at-risk species, we must invest in collaborative, on-the-ground solutions that match the magnitude of the wildlife crisis. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is the bipartisan solution we need.

Notice that it had 185 co-sponsors, or Representatives, who agreed to support it, but only ONE Virginia rep co-sponsored it. Pay attention to whether or not your elected representatives co-sponsor bills you support.

“What We are Watching Chart” (WWWC)

GCA also offers a tool to help you track some of the most significant proposed conservation legislation. On the GCA website, there is a wonderful resource for keeping tabs on proposed bills. The “What We are Watching Chart” (WWWC) reveals what is happening with important conservation legislation and it is updated quarterly.

Click here to access this chart on the GCA website: (remember you must login)

<https://www.gcamerica.org/members/nal#resourceid=3788>

The **What We are Watching Chart** is both a quick reference and a working document which GCA updates to track relevant, prioritized legislation. This chart is a fantastic and fast way for members to stay informed about important conservation bills. It is updated as needed and/or on a quarterly basis. Sources include congress.gov and govtrack.us.

The GCA supports independent, academic, peer-reviewed scientific research as the basis for formulating responsible public policy and legislation, as well as appropriate funding to ensure quality results. WWWC was compiled by members of the National Affairs and Legislation Committee and expresses the views of the writers. NAL Vice Chairman reports are not Board-approved positions of The Garden Club of America.