



July 6, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

On behalf of the National Association of State Trust Lands (NASTL), The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Nature Conservancy, we write to encourage the Department of Interior (DOI) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to revise BLM's 2002 H-2100-1 Acquisition Handbook (the Handbook) to empower state land trusts with the flexibility to better meet the goals of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the school trust obligations of trust managers. Specifically, the Handbook's *Chapter II, Policy and Guidance, Section 4*, restricts the acquisition of lands from a "state, or political subdivision thereof." Without a change to this guidance, state land trusts will continue to be constrained in their ability to participate in LWCF transactions and their many associated benefits.

As you are aware, but perhaps not contemplated by the Handbook, state trust lands are different from typical state lands. They are not public by nature, are scattered in a checkerboard pattern across most western states due to state enabling statutes and represent the single largest set of inholdings within Federal conservation designations. State land trusts hold tremendous potential in meeting the goals identified by the LWCF and the broader conservation and recreation community. The more than 500 million acres of land owned and managed by NASTL members is home to some of the country's finest outdoor spaces, including lands that warrant conservation and recreational access of all sorts, ranging from climbing to hiking to kayaking to sightseeing, and more. In fact, a considerable amount of NASTL member lands are found near or within national park units, national monuments, or other conservation-designated and/or identified areas. Moreover, NASTL member lands often times provide the critical access to other Federally designated lands supporting LWCF's mission.

Problematically, the Handbook prevents the acquisition of state trust lands utilizing LWCF funding. To complete LWCF acquisitions, a "middleman" must be utilized to get around the Handbook requirements—making these transactions cumbersome, difficult, and score poorly when determining national priorities. The now-expanded LWCF program provides an important opportunity to unlock great potential of NASTL members lands to provide critical conservation and recreation opportunities. The only other administrative tool available to school trust lands

managers is to conduct land exchanges with the Federal Government which includes receiving other public lands of equal value in exchange—which continues a state trust land footprint within public lands and due to the fiduciary duty of state trust lands, must be managed for the economic benefit of their state’s schoolchildren.

NASTL and its members stand ready to work with DOI in creating new opportunities for conservation and recreation that realize the fullest potential of the LWCF program. With your help, we believe we can take the steps needed to make NASTL a key Federal conservation partner.

Thank you for your consideration. we look forward to the chance to continue the conversation.

Sincerely,



Ryan Brunner  
President, National Association of State Trust Lands



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The Pew Charitable Trusts



Tom Cors, Director, Lands  
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The Nature Conservancy