

Action Alert:
Sandy Aid Bill - Your Help is Needed Today: January 15, 2013
Oppose Bishop Amendment to H.R. 152 –
Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, 2013

The 113th House of Representatives has begun consideration of the **Disaster Relief Appropriations Act (H.R. 152)** to provide emergency funding for those regions affected by Hurricane Sandy. Over 92 amendments were filed and we need your help opposing an amendment to this much needed bill. The bill is being debated right now and voting could begin today.

Call your Representative and tell them to **oppose the Bishop Amendment to the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act (H.R. 152)**.

The Bishop Amendment

- The Bishop Amendment prohibits the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture from acquiring any more federal land using funds provided in the Hurricane Sandy Emergency Supplemental Legislation. This amendment unnecessarily reduces the ability of affected jurisdictions to respond to the damage and devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy.
- Of the funding made available in this bill, little is likely to be used for federal land acquisition. However, local communities must have as much flexibility as possible in responding to this natural disaster and must be able to count on the federal government as a capable partner.
- Several National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges, including the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, Gateway National Recreation Area, Fire Island National Seashore, Wertheim, Cape May, Forsythe and Stewart McKinney National Wildlife Refuges among others were hard hit by Hurricane Sandy.
- Like in so much of the rest of this country, we consider our National Parks, National Seashores and National Wildlife Refuges great assets to our communities. They provide opportunities for outdoor recreation for millions of residents every year including swimming, fishing, hunting and observing wildlife. They are habitat for wildlife including for resident and migratory birds. They protect places of historic and cultural importance to our nation like Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. They attract tourism from within and outside the U.S. They increase property values and enhance our quality of life. And, now, it is clear, that public lands and the natural systems they protect, buffer built up areas from the impacts of storms.
- Restoration of each of these significantly damaged public resources will require a specific, targeted strategy. A prohibition on land acquisition may well frustrate the ability to bring back the public value of existing park and refuge lands and to meet other community needs. Where new access points are needed, where small purchases are the

best or only means to reestablish the lost value of damaged habitat, the amendment would preclude the purchase of even a single acre needed to reestablish public use and resource integrity.

- While only a small amount of recovery funds from the storm may actually be used for this purpose, one can certainly envision the use of land acquisition to allow restoration of damaged National Parks, to help repair wildlife habitat, and to create new natural buffer zones to protect our communities.
- Land managers and officials at the state, county and local levels have a duty to respond effectively to this disaster. In some cases, that effective response may depend upon acquisition within federal boundaries of very particular parcels that allow for restoration work to proceed and/or are essential to reinstate the integrity of resources in these popular public areas in some of our nation's most densely populated communities.
- Strategic purchases of flood prone and other affected areas in and adjacent to existing public lands can reduce current and future restoration costs and help the surrounding land better handle adverse weather conditions. If land is available and needed for restoration, acquisition should indeed take place. And where it might also reduce community storm risks, it would be wholly irresponsible NOT to allow acquisition.
- This amendment should be defeated not only because it takes away our right to work cooperatively with federal agencies to protect and maintain what is most beautiful and important about our coast, but also because it would set a precedent that runs counter to a one-hundred year history of American conservation—a history that then and now has enjoyed the support of the vast majority of the American people.