

Vermont's Congressional Delegation -- Senator Patrick Leahy (D), Senator Bernie Sanders (I), and Congressman Peter Welch (D) -- on Friday congratulated the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the agency's newly announced decision to acquire the Dunn Estate on Lake Memphremagog.

The picturesque Dunn property includes more than over 400 acres and more than a mile of frontage on Lake Memphremagog. The land was bequeathed to the federal government for the people of Vermont and the nation by Michael Dunn, for conservation and recreation. But the offer came with a deadline: The property must be accepted by September of this year, or it would be sold privately.

The Vermont delegation worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to meet the deadline. In January Leahy, Sanders and Welch wrote to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to request an expedited review of the project. Leahy then renewed that request at a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing with Salazar in March, and after Leahy publicly urged Salazar that the American people and their federal government not miss out on this unique opportunity, Salazar agreed to make the project a high priority. Leahy, Sanders and Welch were also represented at the public hearing in Newport and during site visits, and they have received many letters supporting the project. Public access to the lake is limited, and local residents and community leaders have strongly supported conservation of this unique and scenic expanse.

Senator Leahy said: "Securing this treasured piece of Vermont for Vermonters, forever, and at no cost to taxpayers is the conservation and recreational opportunity of a lifetime on Lake Memphremagog. I thank the Dunn family, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Vermont Land Trust, and the Agency of Natural Resources for making it happen. Michael Dunn has left a perpetual legacy to be enjoyed by generations to come."

Senator Sanders said: "This generous donation of land along the shore will go a long way in both conserving the wildlife habitat around Lake Memphremagog and allowing greater public use of treasured woodlands. Vermont's forests and lakes have always been vital to our economy and critical to our character as a state. I am very pleased that by working together with local, federal and state partners, we have protected this beautiful and valuable natural resource for users today and for generations to come."

Congressman Welch said: "Throughout this process, public input has been critical in the discussion and the ultimate decision to go forward with this property transfer. Hearing from local officials, property owners, state representatives and the general public it became clear that preserving public access to this land was important to all those involved. This decision does that and ensures future generations will continue to enjoy the recreational opportunities of this unique property for years to come."