Since Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in 1964, the fund has opened access to America’s public lands and protected the places we go to enjoy the great outdoors.

The LWCF is responsible for protecting national treasures like the Rocky Mountains and Grand Canyon as well as national forests, monuments, wildlife refuges, and over 40,000 state and local park projects across the country. This vital conservation and recreation program, which has saved places in nearly every state and every county in the U.S., will expire on Sept. 30, 2018 if no action is taken by Congress. Over the coming months, it is vital that we continue urging lawmakers to protect the LWCF so that Americans can explore our parks, trails, and waterways for generations to come.

In Western communities and across the country, outdoor recreation is big business. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, hunting, hiking, camping, and other outdoor recreation activities contribute a total of $887 billion annually to the economy and support 7.6 million American jobs, including 229,000 in Colorado. These jobs are the lifeblood of Western mountain communities like Avon.

Every year, our town welcomes 500,000 visitors seeking to take advantage of all the recreation opportunities the beautiful Vail Valley has to offer. If the LWCF is allowed to expire, some of our most treasured outdoor spaces would lose protection and our local economy would be deeply imperiled.
Congress must also consider how failing to protect our public lands would impact future generations of Americans. Without the LWCF and other common sense protections for our public lands, our children won't have the same opportunities we had to explore the outdoor places we cherish.

Over its 50-year history, the LWCF has given Americans the opportunity to make memories skiing, fishing, and doing a host of other outdoor activities. We have a moral obligation to ensure that future generations have the opportunity to enjoy all the lands, waters, and wildlife this great country has to offer. If Congress fails to reauthorize the LWCF this fall, our children and grandchildren could lose these opportunities and the American way of life we enjoyed will be forever changed.

In the coming months, my community, and communities across America, are counting on our leaders to make good on their commitment to the LWCF and guarantee our families are able enjoy America’s iconic landscapes and waterways for generations to come.

Failure to do so will not only have terrible consequences for the thousands of hard working members of our community that depend on the outdoor recreation industry, but it will deny our children the ability to make precious memories enjoying all the outdoor treasures our country has to offer.

As an elected official, I have seen firsthand the good that can be done when lawmakers come together to promote the common good. It is time for Congress to set aside politics and stand up for the vast majority Americans who agree that the LWCF is essential to protecting our local economies, the places we love, and the way of life our children deserve.

Sarah Smith Hymes is mayor pro tem of Avon, Colorado. She is also a member of the Mountain Pact, a coalition committed to the environmental and economic resilience of Western mountain communities.