Sonja Macys: Ask the President to walk his talk and fully fund the land and water conservation fund

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Congress rarely reaches bipartisan agreement these days, but in March, they came together to pass the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act that, among other things, permanently reauthorized the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Yet one day after signing the act into law and reauthorizing LWCF, the Trump Administration proposed a budget that would cut its funding by 95%.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund was enacted by Congress in 1965 to help preserve, develop and ensure access to outdoor recreation facilities to strengthen the health of U.S. citizens. Up to $900 million annually was authorized for the fund with monies coming from revenues from offshore oil and gas leasing. Despite its $900 million allocation, LWCF has received full funding only once in its history.

Although it is continually underfunded, LWCF nevertheless has shown success. LWCF projects contribute to our natural environment and create jobs and draw visitors for recreation, sporting and other activities.
Here in Steamboat Springs, the fund helped build the popular Yampa River Core Trail and contributed to the development of Howelsen Hill including funds for the tennis courts, ball fields and ski jumps. And we all know the important role Howelsen Hill plays in our community, helping us gain the prestigious distinction of having sent more athletes to the Winter Olympics than any other North American city.

Today, LWCF is being hamstrung by the Trump Administration’s budget. Through the budget he will kill LWCF by simply not funding it. Many valuable LWCF projects now have an uncertain future.

Trump’s Interior Secretary David Bernhardt is visiting Steamboat Springs this week. His proposed cuts to critical conservation programs like LWCF are cause for concern.

The House and Senate appropriations committees and our Colorado Congressional delegation should reject these cuts and push to make sure that LWCF gets the full funding it deserves. Their best shot at achieving this is to include it in the FY 2020 appropriations bill likely to be finalized by the end of September.

Ensuring full and dedicated funding for LWCF is a responsible investment. Through its protection of outdoor places and improving access to recreation, the Land and Water Conservation Fund improves the health and economic well-being of all Americans. The Colorado delegation should stand up for what is important to our community, Colorado and the nation and fully fund LWCF.

Sonja Macys

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Macys’ letter reflects her own perspective and does not constitute the opinion of the full Steamboat Springs City Council.