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Local Colorado Electeds Send Letter to Sens. Bennet, Gardner Urging Action to Push LWCF Over the Finish Line

DURANGO, COLORADO -- On September 30, America’s most successful conservation program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), expired despite promising developments in the House Natural Resources and Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committees to reauthorize the popular fund. In response, 59 elected officials in Colorado sent a letter to Sens. Michael Bennet and Corey Gardner late yesterday requesting that they urge Congress to pick up the pace to ensure that LWCF continues in perpetuity at its fully authorized amount of $900 million. The letter comes from local elected officials in towns, cities and counties across Colorado responsible for serving the needs of their communities, and who have experienced LWCF as an indispensable tool to accomplish that. In addition, 11 resolutions from counties and cities statewide recommending permanent reauthorization and full funding for LWCF were written and signed.

“The Land and Water Conservation Fund is unquestionably America’s most important conservation and recreation program,” said Gwen Lachelt, Executive Director of Western Leaders Network and a La Plata County Commissioner. “It has protected federal public lands, state and local parks, and other natural and recreational resources for future generations remarkably well since 1964. While we have seen forward momentum for renewal of the fund in both House and Senate Committees, we still need to get past the full House and Senate, and then the President. Clearly, the fate of LWCF remains in jeopardy and we must continue to raise our voices to Congress until a permanent LWCF becomes a reality.”

For over 50 years, LWCF has played a critical role in providing funding for conserving national parks and forests, rivers, farms and ranches, fish and wildlife, access for hunters and recreationists, trails, state and local parks, and recreational facilities throughout Colorado and the nation. LWCF has provided more than $268 million in total funding for Colorado, leveraging more than $147 million for local government and state park outdoor recreational investments.

Money from LWCF is also used to protect agricultural land and help prevent and remediate fires and floods. For example, LWCF matching funds enabled the town of Lyons, Colorado to rebuild and extend its St. Vrain Corridor Trail, which suffered nearly $50 million in damages in the devastating floods of 2013. The restoration efforts were significant, not only to quality of life for residents, but in supporting the community’s recreation economy, as Lyons’ parks can draw some 2,000 people on a typical summer weekend.

"Public lands are crucial to the economic prosperity and cultural vitality of our community. We can thank the Land and Water Conservation Fund for helping to fund most of our state’s community parks, ballparks, and trails,” said Kathy Chandler-Henry, Eagle County Commissioner. "The LWCF is a critical piece of legislation that significantly impacts our communities’ recreation opportunities; it needs to be permanently reauthorized and fully funded."
In a study released earlier this year, the Outdoor Industry Association found that the outdoor recreation economy provides 229,000 jobs in Colorado, $28 billion in spending, $9.7 billion in wages and salaries, and $2 billion in tax revenue. Without funding from LWCF for the further protection and enhancement of America’s public lands, the economic success and cultural vitality of local communities will be at risk, and the outdoor recreation industry’s significant contribution to the nation’s economy will suffer.

“Time after time, we have seen that LWCF works. On the Front Range, LWCF helped to fund parks in an area that didn’t have any open space parks for kids, bringing much needed opportunities for healthy and active recreation,” said Jenny Willford, Northglenn City Council. “We have endured too much Congressional delay already. We must continue the pressure to permanently renew and fully fund what is arguably the most effective, bipartisan program in the history of the United States.”

Letter and resolutions can be found here: https://www.westernleaders.org/news/

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