



## CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL COALITION

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### CDTC STATEMENT ON INTRODUCTION OF BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO FUND LWCF AND RESTORE OUR PARKS

**GOLDEN, Colo. (Mar. 9, 2020)** – Earlier today, Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) led a bipartisan group of Senators in introducing the Great American Outdoors Act, which seeks to solve two perennial problems dogging America's most treasured places. The new bill would permanently dedicate \$900 million annually to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and provide funding to address the deferred maintenance backlog across federal public lands.

Over its more than 55-year history, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has helped protect irreplaceable landscapes in every American state and provided outdoor recreation opportunities for countless Americans. With passage of the Dingell Act in early 2019, Congress voted by an overwhelming bipartisan majority to make LWCF permanent, but did not include any guarantee of funding for the program.

Today's bill seeks to remedy this omission by providing permanent, dedicated funding for LWCF, which will stop Congress from diverting money set aside for LWCF into other accounts – something Congress has done to the tune of more than \$22 billion since the fund was created in 1964.

"In the Rocky Mountain West, public lands and trails are vital to our region's economy and our quality of life," said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition. "That's why the certainty provided by full, permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund is so crucial. We're pleased to see legislators who understand that leading the way once more in working to permanently fund LWCF, including Senator Gardner and his Western colleagues who are cosponsoring this bill – Senator Bennet from Colorado, Senators Heinrich and Udall from New Mexico, and Senators Tester and Daines from Montana."



LWCF has been used to protect land and waters all over the United States, such as the Continental Divide Trail and New Mexico's Rio Chama, pictured here as seen from the CDT. *Photo by Kate Bobal.*

The bill, originally announced during a bipartisan press conference last week, also includes funding to begin to address the deferred maintenance backlog across all of our federally-managed public lands. In total, federal land management agencies like the National Park Service and the Forest Service currently face approximately \$20 billion in deferred maintenance – projects such as facility renovations, roadwork, and trail maintenance that are in need of completion but currently cannot move forward due to lack of funding.

"This bill makes an urgent investment in repairing aging infrastructure on our public lands," said Martinez. "We are thrilled to see Congress finally moving to address the public lands maintenance backlog. It will make our nation's parks, forests, and trails safer, more easily accessible, and better equipped to welcome the growing number of Americans who want to experience these national treasures we all share."

Earlier this week, President Trump [tweeted](#) his support for full, permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and pledged to sign a bill that provides this funding and restores National Parks. This apparent change of heart comes after last month's release of his 2021 budget, which proposes to cut funding for LWCF by more than 97%.

"Public lands are not partisan, and the politically diverse group of Senators who came together today to introduce this bill underscores that," said Martinez. "There is still much work to be done, but we are happy to see the President supporting this vital conservation legislation and hope to see it cross the finish line soon."

#### **About the Continental Divide Trail**

The CDT is one of the world's premiere long-distance trails, stretching 3,100 miles from Mexico to Canada along the Continental Divide. Designated by Congress in 1978, the CDT is the highest, most challenging and most remote of the 11 National Scenic Trails. It provides recreational opportunities ranging from hiking to horseback riding to hunting for thousands of visitors each year. While 95% of the CDT is located on public land, approximately 150 miles are still in need of protection.

#### **About the Continental Divide Trail Coalition**

The CDTC was founded in 2012 by volunteers and recreationists hoping to provide a unified voice for the Trail. Working hand-in-hand with the U.S. Forest Service and other federal land management agencies, the CDTC is a non-profit partner supporting stewardship of the CDT. The mission of the CDTC is to complete, promote and protect the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, a world-class national resource. For more information, please visit [continentaldividetrail.org](https://continentaldividetrail.org).

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