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Elected officials sign letter to Congress asking for Gateway Community Dividend



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Western officials ask Congress to add Gateway Community Dividend to the PILT program Photo: Álvaro Serrano

JACKSON, Wyo. — Nearly 70 county commissioners, mayors, and council members from 11 western states, sent a letter to congressional offices asking them to add a Gateway Community Dividend to the Payments in Lieu Taxes program. The letter was sent on Wednesday, Oct. 21.

The letter states: “To help gateway communities deal with additional costs, Congress should expand the PILT Program to include a ‘Gateway Community Dividend,’ which would add a 50 percent premium for every acre of permanently protected federal public lands to the current PILT formula. This dividend would be paid to counties with federally protected public lands within their jurisdiction, particularly lands that restrict extractive activity, such as wild & scenic rivers, wilderness areas, and national parks.”

Mayor Pete Muldoon and County Commissioner Greg Epstein signed the letter along with lawmakers from Washington, Utah, Oregon, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Montana, Idaho, and Colorado.

In 1976 Congress created the PILT program, which requires the federal government to make annual payments to local governments to compensate them for property taxes not collected on lands owned by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and some military installations within their jurisdictions.

Congress generally funds PILT for only one year at a time, which makes budget planning difficult for counties because they don't know how much the payments will be from year to year.

In 2019, counties across the country received more than \$514 million in PILT payments. Based on estimates, a new Gateway Community Dividend would provide an additional \$207 million annually to counties – funds that will help communities maintain critical infrastructure and provide essential services for both residents and visitors.