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Opinion: We all need public lands to recover from the coronavirus outbreak

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OPINION

Melissa Sherburne

In the months to come, our nation's parks, trails and outdoor spaces will be integral to our nation's coping and recovery, especially here in Colorado. Great parks and green spaces make stronger, healthier communities.

America's public lands bring us peace of mind and generate economic revenue — both will be critically needed to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.



Melissa Sherburne, councilwoman for the Town of Frisco

As Congress works on an economic stimulus packages and bills in this time of public health emergency, I hope the Colorado delegation will invest in our parks, public lands and outdoor recreation in recognition of their importance to our economy, and to our

communities' wellbeing, through full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

In early May, the Town of Frisco along with over 100 other western local elected officials (and over 60 from Colorado) signed onto a letter asking Congress include full and permanent LWCF funding in an upcoming stimulus package.

Our national, state and local parks, trails and public lands are a critical economic driver for communities big and small, urban and rural, across the nation. Investing now in full funding for LWCF will help with a strong long-term recovery for mountain communities like Frisco.

Since 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been a champion of public spaces, investing over \$280 million in Colorado alone. More importantly, it has done all this at no cost to the taxpayer.

The LWCF funding model is simple — take royalties from companies mining the natural resources of oil and gas and invest those monies into protecting the land and water of our country.

Originally a bipartisan initiative, LWCF has continued to have the support of lawmakers from both sides of the aisle for decades, proving that supporting public lands isn't political, it is just common sense.

Frisco is one of thousands of cities in the American West that benefits from LWCF grants through protection of thousands of acres of lands and waters, as well as public playgrounds and ballfields.

The places are more critical than ever to community members of all ages to safely spend time outdoors, exercise, and have peace of mind. In Frisco alone, LWCF has contributed to our Walter Bryon Memorial Park and Frisco Lakefront Pathway, in addition to many others throughout Summit County and nearby communities.

Public lands and recreation also drive our economy. Every [dollar](#) spent on LWCF returns \$4 in economic value from natural resource goods and services alone – over and above the

economic benefit of the outdoor recreation economy and tourism. The program is truly a win-win for voters and our land alike.

Broadly-supported, bipartisan LWCF legislation was already in Congress' queue before coronavirus upended the calendar — it is directly relevant, ready to go, and makes sense for Congress to include in a stimulus package or stand along bill if possible and appropriate.

Last Thursday, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell stated that the Senate would take up the Great American Outdoors Act, which includes full and permanent funding for LWCF, when it returns in June.

Investing in our public lands, and providing full, permanent funding for LWCF is a low-cost economic stimulus that will pay big dividends for communities like Frisco across America. Sens. Cory Gardner and Michael Bennet and Rep. Joe Neguse, please include full and permanent LWCF funding in efforts to stimulate our economy.

We in the West know firsthand the powers of the great outdoors, and it's time to protect those spaces for generations to come.

Melissa Sherburne is a Councilwoman for the Town of Frisco, Colorado. She holds a Masters of Environmental Management from Duke University and a B.A. in Environmental Studies from CU-Boulder; is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, and the Urban Land Institute; and is a local development professional. Melissa lives in Frisco with her husband and two children.

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