

FEATURED

Gardner rolls out bill to preserve Trump-endangered funds for national parks

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Joey Bunch, Colorado Politics



Colorado U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner talks about a bill to restore funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, about \$900 million in oil and gas lease money that supports national parks, as well as other public lands and waters, during a press conference on Wednesday, March 4, 2020.

Photo courtesy of Sen. Cory Gardner's office

U.S. Sen. Cory Gardner led a press conference in Washington, D.C. Wednesday to formalize his bill to fully restore oil and gas money used on national parks.

Colorado Politics reported on his intention Tuesday, after President Trump — who slashed funding in the first place — said he would sign a bill to restore it, if it was passed by Gardner and co-sponsor Steve Daines of Montana, another Republican senator facing a tough re-election bid this year.

“The LWCF supports projects in Colorado and all across our country at no cost to the taxpayer, and fighting every year to figure out how much money the program will receive doesn’t provide the long-term planning certainty that our outdoor and conservation community deserves,” Gardner said Wednesday. “I thank President Trump and Leader (Mitch) McConnell for their support and look forward to getting full, permanent funding signed into law.”

The bill would restore about \$900 million a year for national parks and other public lands.

You can watch the press conference on Facebook [by clicking here](#).

Democrats have held Republicans, especially Gardner, responsible for the potential loss of funding attributable to Trump.

The official announcement came the same day as another Coloradan, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, was on Capitol Hill defending the administration's proposed \$2 billion in proposed cuts for the agency, where he was "visibly shaking and combative" in a discussion of migratory birds, [Bloomberg News reported](#).

The Colorado Democratic Party accused Gardner of trying to "greenwash" his environmental record.

“Cory Gardner and Donald Trump can greenwash all they want — but the facts show that Gardner and Trump have consistently sold out our public lands to appease their special interest donors,” Colorado Democratic Party spokesperson David Pourshoustari said in a statement Wednesday.

Democrats accused Gardner of other conservation missteps, if their view.

"Coloradans want a senator who will actually stand up for our environment -- not one who just uses our public lands for an election year talking point," Pourshoustari said.

Jim Ramey, Colorado state director for [The Wilderness Society](#), said Gardner and Colorado's senior senator, Democrat Michael Bennet, listened to bipartisan concerns about the Trump cut.

“Efforts to fully fund this successful conservation program have had support from many Colorado leaders, including Governor Polis and former Governor Hickenlooper, and a majority of the state’s congressional delegation who voted for permanent reauthorization of the Fund early last year,” he pointed out.

"Coloradans will continue to call on our congressional leaders to stand up and pass this bill."

Teresa Martinez, executive director of the Golden-based Continental Divide Trail Coalition, pointed out that public lands and trails are vital to the economy and quality of life in the Rocky Mountain West.

“That’s why the certainty provided by full, permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund is so crucial," she said. "We’re pleased to see legislators who understand that leading the way once more in working to permanently fund LWCF, including Sen. Gardner and his Western colleagues who are cosponsoring this bill, like Sens. (Martin) Heinrich and (Tom) Udall from New Mexico."

Anna Peterson, executive director of The Mountain Pact, based in Durango, said were thrilled by the potential to restore the fund.

"Hypocritically the administration's budget slashes LWCF funding by a 97% cut, but yesterday President Trump tweeted that he is now supportive of fully funding the program," she said in a statement. "We hope this tweet is sincere."



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