

## Continent's crown jewel and state's economy depend on LWCF

### Guest column

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If Glacier National Park is truly the Crown Jewel of the Continent, then it's fair to say that Montana is the crown jewel of our country. People flock from all over the world to experience Big Sky Country and to hike, fish and hunt in our expansive public lands. As Montanans, we have the privilege to live in one of the most beautiful corners of the world. And with that comes the responsibility to be good stewards and protectors of our land — land that we depend on for recreation and to support our livelihoods.

Unfortunately, one of the key programs that has allowed us to preserve and protect our public lands — the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) — faces an uncertain future. The program, which was established by Congress over 50 years ago, has played a vital role in protecting national parks, forests, monuments, waterways, wildlife refuges and local park projects in every county across the U.S. — all without using a single dollar from taxpayers. Instead, LWCF is funded by a portion of royalties from energy companies paying to drill for oil and gas in the outer Continental Shelf.

Thanks to LWCF's historically widespread popularity and bipartisan support in Congress, we have carefully preserved places of wonder in Montana. LWCF has invested more than \$579 million to protect Montana's open spaces, historic sites and increase recreation access. From national parks and national forests to ballfields and community parks, LWCF has protected places like Bitterroot National Forest, Nez Perce National Historical Park, Lolo National Forest, Lone Pine State Park and, of course, Glacier National Park.

Communities that depend on Montana's thriving public recreation economy, like Missoula, are built on the backbone of LWCF. Montana's \$7.1 billion outdoor recreation industry is an economic powerhouse —

supporting 71,000 jobs which generate \$2.2 billion in wages and salaries and produces \$286 million annually in state and local tax revenue.

But all this is at risk if Congress doesn't act to save LWCF. LWCF is set to expire on Sept. 30. The toll its absence would take on our communities would be devastating. Congress, very simply, must prioritize LWCF.

We thank U.S. Sen. Jon Tester for his unwavering leadership on LWCF and U.S. Sen. Steve Daines for his support, and hope they will continue to put pressure on Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and their fellow congresspeople to secure full funding and the renewal of the program. Zinke strongly advocated for LWCF while representing Montanans in Congress but his support has been absent in his role as Interior secretary, as he failed include sufficient LWCF funds in his proposed budget for fiscal year 2019. In fact, the budget President Trump and Zinke sent to Congress would nearly eliminate LWCF entirely.

We hope Secretary Zinke will remember why he championed LWCF when he represented us in Congress. We need his support to continue to preserve Montana's public lands that provide boundless enjoyment and serve as a vital economic driver for our state.

*Bryan von Lossberg is a Missoula City Council alderman representing Ward 1, and Missoula City Council president. Sen. Nate McConnell, D-Missoula, represents Senate District 48 in the Montana Legislature.*



Ward 1 City Council representative Bryan von Lossberg  
*provided photo*



Nate McConnell  
*Courtesy photo*

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