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## **U.S. Senate passes public lands bill; Colorado Dems accuse Gardner of ‘greenwashing’**

**CORE Act not included with Great American Outdoors legislation**

By [Jacob Wallace](#) Herald Staff Writer  
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The Great American Outdoors Act passed the Senate by a 73-25 vote Wednesday, a rare bipartisan bill considered a major win for conservation nationwide.

“This is a legacy for our public lands,” said Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo. “This is a generational opportunity to give back to this country something lasting.”



Gardner

Gardner, one of the lead co-sponsors of the bill, said he is working with his colleagues in the House of Representatives to ensure its passage. President Donald Trump is expected to sign the bill into law if it passes without amendment.

More than 800 conservation groups and six former secretaries of the Interior previously stated their support for the bill, emphasizing its ability to reduce the maintenance backlog on public lands while bolstering the tourism economy of mountain towns at a time when they are being particularly hard hit by the pandemic.

“Public lands, parks and trails are vital to restoring our country’s health and way of life amidst the COVID-19 pandemic,” Anna Peterson, executive director of The Mountain Pact, said in a statement. “We thank the Senate for passing The Great American Outdoors Act and now urge the House of Representatives to quickly follow suit.”

Democrats also support the bill but have accused Gardner and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of “greenwashing” by bringing up the bill during an election year. Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., noted that he had introduced legislation to permanently reauthorize and fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund in every Congress since he was elected in 2010, but this was the first time funding had received robust bipartisan support.

“Public lands are part of our legacy, our culture and our history in Colorado,” Bennet said in a statement. “After a decade of leading this effort, I’m thrilled the Senate has finally passed full funding for LWCF.”

Gardner refuted this, noting that he supported legislation in 2019 that reauthorized the LWCF.

“They’re just partisan grapes,” he said.

Previously, Gardner has voted for budgets proposed by Trump that slash conservation spending, earning him a lifetime score of 11% from the League of Conservation Voters. In 2011, when Gardner was still a U.S. representative, he also voted for a budget amendment that would slash funding by 90% for the LWCF, the very entity that would be fully funded by the Great American Outdoors Act.

The Great American Outdoors Act is also co-sponsored by Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., who is facing a tough re-election campaign against former Democratic governor and presidential candidate Steve Bullock. When asked whether the decision to bring the bill to a vote in an election year was an act of political maneuvering, McConnell said in a news conference that the bill is a rare opportunity to pass something with broad support.

“It is in proximity to an election, but that makes it even more remarkable that we’re actually able to get together in spite of the contests that are going on all over the country,” he said.



Hickenlooper

Former Colorado governor and U.S. Senate candidate John Hickenlooper said Gardner, whom he is running to unseat in the 2020 election, is using the Great American Outdoors Act as “cover” to hide a poor record on conservation and public lands.

“Obviously, he thinks it’s going to give him cover,” Hickenlooper said during a campaign town hall last week. “The question would be why for the previous years he didn’t support it.”

The town hall, organized by his campaign and held June 12, was also attended by Sens. Bennet and Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., and Rep. Joe Neguse, D-Colo. All are co-sponsors of the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act, which would designate about 400,000 acres of new wilderness areas, recreation and conservation management areas, and a first-ever National Historic Landscape in the state of Colorado. Bennet has attempted to introduce the act as an amendment to the Great American Outdoors Act.



Bennet

“On the CORE Act, Sen. Gardner has been completely missing in action,” Bennet said. “There is a huge difference in the record here.”

Gardner made it clear that he wanted to get the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act passed without additional amendments, including the CORE Act.

“Press conferences are great, but what’s even better is Cory Gardner actually leading action on the most historic conservation legislation in over 50 years,” said Meghan Graf, a spokesperson for Gardner’s campaign.

Many of the Great American Outdoors Act’s supporters have urged lawmakers to pass the bill without amendments, worrying they would slow its passage or poison the bill’s bipartisan support.

Ultimately, the CORE Act was left off the Great American Outdoors Act when it passed the Senate. But Bennet and Hickenlooper hope by bringing the bill to Gardner’s attention, they can force the senator to make a statement one way or the other about public lands.

“Sen. Gardner has had his chance to support the CORE Act, he’s refused to support the CORE Act,” Bennet said. “We don’t have two senators supporting it. John Hickenlooper supports it, and I think it’s one of the reasons why it’s essential for him to win in the Senate.”

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