



June 5, 2019

Dear Honorable Colorado Senators Bennet and Gardner,

First of all, we would like to enthusiastically thank you for your support of permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). As local elected officials from mountain communities in the West we represent 1000+ year-round residents, all of whom recognize the importance of adequate funding for public lands conservation, preservation, enhancement, and expansion. Although we are pleased with the passage of permanent reauthorization, this is just a first step. We now urge you to support and advance *full and dedicated funding* for the LWCF.

The LWCF has provided funding over the last 52 years for countless federal, state, and local public lands projects in every county in the United States.<sup>1</sup> These resources have helped to create an extensive network of public lands and waters for conservation, ecosystem preservation, and for all Americans to enjoy. Outdoor recreation and proximity to open spaces - many of which have been enhanced through the use of the LWCF - draw residents and tourists to mountain communities which provides significant economic support as well as a distinct and desirable way of life. A recent study found that counties in close proximity to public lands perform substantially better in key economic factors such as employment and personal income than counties without nearby public lands.<sup>2</sup>

Since the LWCF expired in late September 2018, the fund has lost more than \$350 million that should have been used for the conservation, enhancement, and protection of public lands and waterways. Many projects funded by the LWCF have an uncertain future due to the current lack of funding and historically unpredictable nature of funding for the program. Thus, we urge you to pass *full and dedicated* funding to ensure our public lands receive the protection they deserve now, and into the future.

The LWCF is a vital component of job creation and economic development through support for public land infrastructure. Reports show that the LWCF provides a strong return on investment. One study found that for every \$1 of LWCF funds invested there is a remarkable return of \$4 in economic value.<sup>3</sup>

Our communities are inextricably linked to the public lands that surround them. Our residents and business owners rely on public lands visitation and exploration for economic success and cultural vitality. The LWCF supports and enhances public lands, and as such, our communities. You have the opportunity to provide full funding to support this incredible program. So please, vote to fully fund the LWCF in support of our mountain communities, and public lands for *all* Americans.

Sincerely,

Ridgway Town Council

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<sup>1</sup> <http://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/384469-local-economies-need-the-land-and-water-conservation-fund>

<sup>2</sup> <https://headwaterseconomics.org/public-lands/federal-lands-performance/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits-LWCF-ROI%20Report-11-2010.pdf>