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Bennet Celebrates Passage of Historic Public Lands Package to Fully Fund LWCF and Reduce the Public Lands Maintenance Backlog

June 17, 2020

Bennet Has Led the Fight to Fully Fund LWCF, Invest in Our Public Lands for Over a Decade

Washington, D.C. – Today, Colorado U.S. Senator Michael Bennet applauded Senate passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, historic public lands legislation to permanently and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million and begin to address the \$19 billion public lands maintenance backlog. Since his arrival to the U.S. Senate, Bennet has championed LWCF, introducing legislation to fully fund the program in every Congress since 2010, and fought for more infrastructure, maintenance, and recreation funding for our land management agencies.

“Public lands are part of our legacy, our culture, and our history in Colorado. After a decade of leading this effort, I’m thrilled the Senate has finally passed full funding for LWCF,” **said Bennet**. “This is the culmination of years of hard work by Coloradans – from county commissioners and local elected leaders to conservation groups, hunters and anglers, and outdoor recreation businesses. They have put in the work, year after year, calling for Congress to fully fund LWCF, invest in our public lands, and support our state’s economy. Their dedication and advocacy are why we were able to pass this bill today.”

“Public lands are a central part of our Colorado quality of life and a key driver for our local economies, and Senate passage of the Great American Outdoors Act is a huge step forward in making much-needed investments in our outdoor heritage. We thank Senator Bennet for his efforts on this vital bipartisan legislation, and for his longstanding leadership in defending LWCF and conserving cherished public lands from the Hermosa watershed to the Thompson Divide,” **said David Nickum, Executive Director, Colorado Council, Trout Unlimited.**

“Osprey Packs would like to both thank and congratulate Senator Bennet on his longstanding efforts to see the Great American Outdoors Act passed within the Senate this week, inclusive of full funding for the LWCF. Using modern and innovative solutions along with sustainable funding, the GAOA will directly serve to protect our vulnerable federal lands including parks and recreation areas susceptible to impact and overuse and exacerbated by ongoing surges in visitation after these long months of quarantine. While we also ask the critical work continue to see passage of the CORE Act, as an Outdoor Industry, Colorado-based company dependent on both a healthy environment and active, outdoor consumer economy, we are overjoyed to see the GAOA’s dual goals of protection and repair achieved,” **said Layne Rigney, C.E.O., Osprey Packs.**

“Today, the Senate delivered a major win for conservation. The Great American Outdoors Act is critical to Colorado's recovery from many of the economic, health and social challenges we are facing. Fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund and investing in our national parks will help rejuvenate our outdoor recreation economy, create jobs, expand recreational access for all and protect treasured landscapes for future generations. We’re grateful for Senator Bennet’s leadership in this effort and we urge the House of Representatives to quickly pass this critical investment in Colorado’s amazing outdoors,” **said Carlos Fernandez, Colorado State Director, The Nature Conservancy.**

“The Senate’s passage of Great American Outdoors Act today is truly momentous. Enacting full funding for the LWCF will be an essential tool for America’s economic recovery by supporting and enhancing our public lands while also helping to revive and grow local outdoor recreation economies. This legislation will also address the maintenance backlog on our public lands. We applaud Senators Bennet, Gardner, Manchin, Burr and all of the bipartisan leaders in the U.S. Senate for championing this critical conservation program,” **said Larry Selzer, President and CEO, The Conservation Fund.**

“New Belgium Brewing applauds Senator Bennet’s consistent and dedicated championship of public lands legislation, including support for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, as we celebrate the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. Colorado’s public lands drive our businesses – from breweries and restaurants, to bike shops and fly-fishing guides – and inspire our adventures with family and friends. The passage of GAOA is an incredible milestone in ensuring protections for our environment, our economy and our well-being. We celebrate this significant win, and look forward to future wins including passage of the CORE Act!” – **Steve Fechheimer, CEO, New Belgium Brewing**

“Since its creation in 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has enjoyed some of the most bipartisan support we have ever seen for conservation legislation. We’d like to thank Senator Bennet and the members of our federal delegation who worked for years to fully fund and permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This critical legislation will play a significant role in Colorado’s path to economic recovery while ensuring that we have more public lands, open space, and parks during this time of a pandemic when so many people are finding solace in the outdoors,” **said Jessica Goad, Deputy Director, Conservation Colorado.**

“For the last decade, Senator Bennet has led legislative efforts to permanently authorize and dedicate full funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Just as significant, he’s helped orchestrate more than a dozen LWCF projects right here in Colorado – efforts that benefit hunters, anglers and all outdoor enthusiasts that value access and quality experiences in wild places. We appreciate his leadership on the Great American Outdoors Act and his commitment to fighting for increased resources to address maintenance backlogs across all our public lands management agencies. More than ever, we need adequate resources to improve management of our natural resources, enhance wildlife habitat, improve public access, ensure the health of our watersheds and forests, and support local communities and the outdoor economy that drives \$778 billion annually in our country – including \$37 billion alone in Colorado,” **said John Gale, Conservation Director, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers.**

“The Great American Outdoors Act is an enormous victory for public lands and for rural economies here in the Mountain West,” **said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director, Continental Divide Trail Coalition.** “It will address vital needs on our trails and forests. It will create jobs. And by fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund, it will be absolutely critical to our efforts to complete the Continental Divide Trail. Senator Bennet has made permanently reauthorizing and fully funding LWCF a priority for more than a decade. We are grateful for his

longstanding leadership, and thrilled that we are one giant step closer to seeing that happen with the Senate's passage of the Great American Outdoors Act.”

“The Conservation Alliance thanks Senator Bennet for his leadership in helping to pass the Great American Outdoors Act in the Senate, and for his many years of support for fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We also thank him for his fervent effort to protect Colorado’s public lands, and we are hopeful that both the GAOA and the CORE Act will get signed into law this Congress,” **said Brady Robinson, Executive Director, The Conservation Alliance.**

“As the country takes steps toward economic recovery from COVID-19, federal investment in our public lands and waterways are critical to boost local economies, create thousands of jobs and protect and improve our national parks,” **said Lise Aangeenbrug, Executive Director, Outdoor Industry Association (OIA).** “These investments would also increase community access to nearby parks and trails, helping address gaps between where people live and nearby opportunities. In turn, more Americans will benefit from the health and well-being that parks and trails provide.”

“The Land and Water Conservation Fund is the most powerful program we have for conserving habitat and opening access on America’s 640 million acres of public lands,” **said Whit Fosburgh, President and CEO, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.** “We commend all lawmakers who have put their weight behind the Great American Outdoors Act, and we urge the Senate and House to pass this critical legislation into law.”

“For years, our national parks have been underfunded and understaffed while also dealing with a mounting backlog of repair needs, totaling nearly \$12 billion,” **said Theresa Pierno, President and CEO, National Parks Conservation Association.** “In Colorado alone, national parks are facing more than \$250 million in needed repairs to crumbling trails, roads and buildings from Rocky Mountain to Great Sand Dunes. Today, with Senator Bennet’s help to pass the Great American Outdoors Act, we made big strides towards a brighter future for our parks and public lands. We commend Senator Bennet for his efforts to ensure park visitors can continue to experience and enjoy these treasured places now, and for years to come.”

“Senator Bennet has led or co-sponsored Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) full funding legislation six times in every Congress for a decade. His position on this issue is crystal clear and we thank him for his support of one of our best conservation programs for over ten years,” **said Ridgway, Colorado Mayor John Clark.**

“Senator Bennet has worked to support and secure funding for more than a dozen Colorado Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) acquisition projects, working with local stakeholders to make this happen - including Salida's Milk Run Trail. We thank him for his long-term and continued efforts over many, many years to secure this funding for local community projects,” **said Salida, Colorado Mayor P.T. Wood.**

“We can't thank Senator Bennet enough for his decade-long work leading Land and Water Conservation Funding legislation. He's worked with local leaders for many years to bring money for locally-led LWCF projects. He deserves a lot of gratitude for ten years of work on this important issue to our Colorado communities,” **said Anna Peterson, Executive Director, Mountain Pact, an organization that works with local elected officials in the west and with over 30 mountain communities across Colorado.**

“Coloradans need healthier, safer and better access to public lands, parks and outdoor spaces that build community and support our physical and mental health. Senate passage of the Great American Outdoors Act gets us a step closer to Congress keeping a promise to Coloradans to invest in the natural, cultural and recreational resources that are the heart of our communities,” **said Jim Ramey, Colorado State Director, The Wilderness Society.** “We appreciate Senator Bennet’s decade of work to fully fund the Land Water and Conservation Fund, and urge the House to get the Great American Outdoors Act to the President’s desk, and with it, permanent funding for LWCF over the finish line.”

In March, Bennet and a bipartisan group of senators [introduced](#) the Great American Outdoors Act to permanently and fully fund LWCF at \$900 million annually, and establish a separate, five-year restoration fund to address the maintenance backlog at the National Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Education, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Bennet’s Record on LWCF:

Bennet has made permanently reauthorizing and fully funding LWCF a top priority since joining the Senate more than a decade ago, co-sponsoring [legislation](#) to fully fund LWCF in 2010 and in every subsequent Congress. In 2015, Bennet served as the lead Democrat, alongside lead Republican U.S. Senator Richard Burr (R-N.C.), on bipartisan [legislation](#) to permanently reauthorize the program. When LWCF expired in September 2015, Bennet [spoke](#) on the Senate floor and [wrote](#) to Congressional

leadership to help secure a three-year authorization in the end-of-year spending bill. When the program was set to expire again in September 2018, Bennet worked with Burr to file an [amendment](#) to the Farm Bill, and later [successfully](#) secured permanent reauthorization of LWCF as part of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act in March 2019. He joined the [full-funding bill](#) for the sixth Congress in a row in April 2019 when it was reintroduced.

Colorado Impact:

LWCF has invested more than \$281 million in Colorado projects since its inception in the 1960s.

Over the years, Bennet has worked alongside local elected leaders, conservationists, and private landowners to support and secure funding for locally-led LWCF projects. Bennet has also visited several LWCF-funded projects, such as the [Ophir Valley](#) in 2014, the [Animas River Trail](#) in 2016, and the [Yampa River Project](#) in 2018, to highlight the importance of LWCF in Colorado.

- In 2009, Bennet supported the Ben Delatour Scout Ranch as a top conservation funding priority. After working with the Longs Peak Council of the Boy Scouts of America for two years to make this priority a reality, Bennet [helped permanently](#) protect the Ben Delatour Scout Ranch using LWCF dollars.
- In 2010 and 2012, Bennet [helped secure](#) funding for properties along the Gunnison River to expand the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area and the Bangs Canyon Special Recreation Management Area.
- In 2010, Bennet [celebrated](#) the completion of an LWCF project to permanently protect 2,800 acres of land owned by Snow Mountain Ranch/YMCA of the Rockies.
- In 2013, Bennet pushed to protect the Sawtooth Mountain Ranch on Owl Creek Pass using LWCF dollars under the Forest Legacy program. After visiting the site in July 2014, Bennet later [announced](#) that the necessary funds were approved.
- In 2014, Bennet [visited the Ophir Valley](#) to hike near a [recently completed LWCF project](#), one that he long supported, to protect parts of the valley from future mining and development.
- In 2015, Bennet [celebrated](#) the conservation of the Toll and Ranch Property, one of the largest intact private properties along the Front Range in the South Boulder Creek Watershed.

- In 2016, Bennet [took a raft trip along the Upper Colorado River](#) to tour an LWCF project that was underway to expand public access in Eagle County. After writing in support of the effort, he [applauded](#) the completion of the project in 2019.
- In 2017, after weighing in with strong support, Bennet [celebrated the completion](#) of the Cascade Cottage project in Rocky Mountain National Park with which NPS acquired the last privately-held commercial operation in the park.
- In 2018, Bennet [recognized](#) the completion of an LWCF project near the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park that he supported throughout the process. The project [added 2,494 acres to the park](#).
- In 2019, Bennet wrote in support of local efforts for the White River National Forest to acquire the Sweetwater Lake property, a project that was [recently ranked as a top priority](#) for future funding.

Land Management Agency Funding:

Bennet has also advocated for robust funding for federal land management agencies for years, [sending a letter](#) to former Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke in 2017 with proposals to address the national park maintenance backlog in Colorado. Bennet co-sponsored the [Restore Our Parks Act](#) in 2018, and [then visited Rocky Mountain National Park](#) to discuss the need to pass the bill, highlighting opportunities to improve employee housing. Bennet was an original cosponsor of the legislation when it was [reintroduced](#) in 2019. In addition to his work on the National Park maintenance backlog, Bennet led [the effort to end fire borrowing](#) and reform the Forest Service budget, to make more funding available for non-fire related activities. He has [continued to press the administration to invest in recreation, infrastructure, and forest health](#), leading the Colorado delegation in a [recent letter to leadership regarding future stimulus legislation](#).

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