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U.S. Senate passes major public lands bill backed by Colorado senators

Great American Outdoors Act now heads to the U.S. House

By Justin Wingerter |

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Joe Amon, The Denver Post

The last light of the sun catches mountain tops near Bear Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park on Jan. 23, 2015.

The U.S. Senate on Wednesday passed the [Great American Outdoors Act](#), a public lands bill that will fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund and end a massive maintenance backlog at national parks, including those in Colorado.

The Senate voted 73-25 in favor of the bill, sending it on to the U.S. House, where it is expected to pass in the coming weeks. President Donald Trump has pledged to sign the legislation, which was authored and co-authored by Colorado senators.

“Today, the Senate passed not only the single greatest conservation achievement in generations, but also a lifeline to mountain towns and recreation communities hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said [Sen. Cory Gardner](#), a Yuma Republican.

“After a decade of leading this effort, I’m thrilled the Senate has finally passed full funding for LWCF,” said [Sen. Michael Bennet](#), a Denver Democrat.

The bill’s two prerogatives — full funding for LWCF and addressing the \$20 billion maintenance backlog at national parks — have been bipartisan priorities for many years and the bill had overwhelmingly support from a wide range of environmental advocacy groups. Trump’s support, in March, ensured its passage in the Senate.

“Originally a bipartisan initiative, LWCF has continued to have the support of lawmakers from both sides of the aisle for decades, proving that supporting public lands isn’t political, it is just common sense,” said Dan Richardson, the mayor of Carbondale, in an emailed statement Wednesday.

Gardner, the bill’s sponsor, [has touted his ability to bring Trump on board](#) and accomplish this year what other senators had not been able to accomplish for decades. Facing a tough re-election fight in November, the senator is sure to wield his success on the bill as proof he deserves another six years in the Senate.

Democrats have applauded the Great American Outdoors Act, which Bennet co-sponsored, but urged Gardner to go farther by supporting Bennet’s [CORE Act](#), which expands Colorado’s public lands. Gardner has not backed the CORE Act.

At a debate Tuesday night, the two Democrats vying to face Gardner in November said they support the Great American Outdoors Act, but believe it’s not enough.

“The CORE Act will protect 400,000 acres, as I mentioned. Why can’t he support that?” asked [John Hickenlooper](#).

“The truth is, I’m not intent on just opposing everything Cory Gardner’s for,” said [Andrew Romanoff](#). “So, yeah, I’m glad he helped pass this law.”