



The Mountain Pact

August 2020 Conservation Update

In this Conservation Update, we report on the the decision by the Trump administration to withdraw the controversial nomination of William Perry Pendley as the Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); the ongoing COVID-19 and wildfire challenges our mountain communities are facing; the Trump administration's proposed roll backs of royalty payments for oil and gas producers on public lands; the BLM's cancellation of oil and gas drilling lease sales in the Moab, Utah area; and more.



The Land and Water Conservation Fund

In early August, [The Great American Outdoors Act](#) became law! This is one of the most significant conservation bills in decades. This historic legislation provides permanent and full funding at \$900 million annually for the [Land Water Conservation Fund](#) (LWCF) - one of our country's most powerful programs for conserving habitat and ensuring access to our public lands. It also provides billions of dollars to address the national parks maintenance backlog. The Mountain Pact thanks all of the local elected officials and members of Congress and their staff who have worked for decades to ensure full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The Trust for Public Land has created a wonderful [interactive online map](#) of the United States that shows the lands across the country that could be permanently protected now that the Land and Water Conservation Fund has full and permanent funding. [The Mountain Pact](#) will continue to monitor LWCF funding opportunities and ways for communities to benefit from The Great American Outdoors Act.

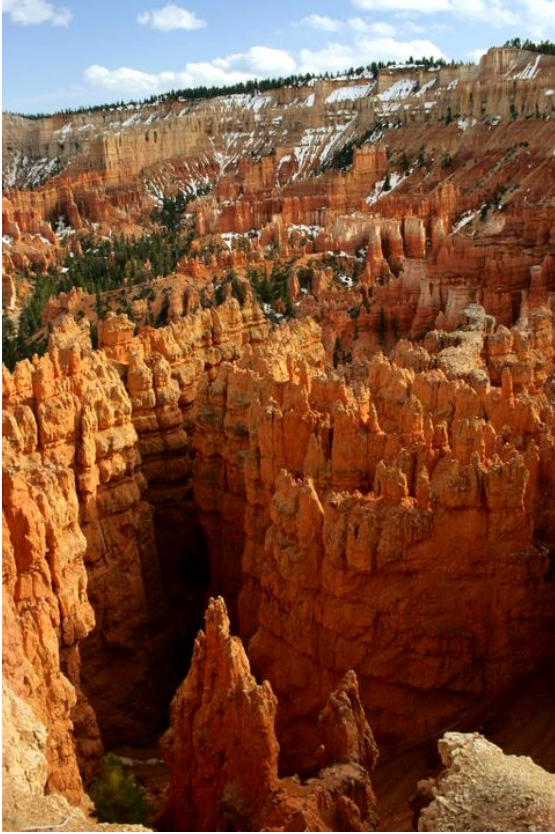
How the Coronavirus Pandemic is Impacting our Mountain Communities & Other Mountain Community News

- [National parks are being overrun](#) during COVID-19, endangering the surrounding communities.
- Despite the risks of contracting COVID-19, [business is booming at national parks](#).
- Two Yellowstone concession workers and three visitors [tested positive](#) for the coronavirus.
- Pandemic travelers are [flocking to Idaho](#) for outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Zion National Park rangers are looking for the [vandals who painted rocks blue](#).
- Jackson, Wyoming is struggling with [surging tourism](#), which is straining the gateway town.
- [How many wildland firefighters have COVID-19?](#) Some agencies won't or can't say.
- [Fundraising efforts have begun](#) to help pay for restoration work on lands, including Glenwood Canyon, damaged in the Grizzly Creek, CO fire.
- [Tiny plastic particles are piling up](#) in Idaho's wild places.
- Are shrimp flavored dog treats [the answer to keeping Lake Tahoe blue?](#)
- [It's time for the Senate to act on the Colorado Outdoor Recreation & Economy \(CORE\) Act.](#)
- Much of the U.S. economy is in decline because of the pandemic, but [home sales are skyrocketing at a record pace](#). [Homes in the West have never been so expensive.](#)



The Trump Administration Agenda

After a public outcry, the Trump



administration [withdrew the nomination of William Perry Pendley](#), an anti-public lands crusader, to be the head of the Bureau of Land Management. Pendley continues to serve, as he has for over a year, in his current position as the de facto leader of the agency without being confirmed by the Senate as required by the U.S. Constitution. Pendley set up this [arrangement himself. Legal experts say the succession orders are questionable.](#)

The decision to withdraw the nomination suggests that the Trump administration believed [there wasn't enough support in the Senate](#) to confirm Pendley, whose nomination

was seen by many as [hurting the re-election chances](#) of three vulnerable western Republican Senators - Cory Gardner of Colorado, Steve Daines of Montana, and Martha McSally of Arizona.

- Now that Pendley's nomination has been withdrawn and he continues to serve as the unconfirmed director, [conservation groups, including the Mountain Pact, are calling for his removal.](#) For over a year, [The Mountain Pact has been advocating that Pendley is not qualified to lead the Bureau of Land Management.](#)
- [Montana Governor Steve Bullock has also called for Pendley's removal.](#)
- [New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich led the entire Senate Democratic Caucus in calling for Pendley's removal.](#)
- Before the Trump administration withdrew Pendley's nomination, it drew outrage in many quarters. Here are some of the articles about why he is wholly unfit for the job.
 - [Trump's pick to manage public lands has a four-decade history of "overt racism" toward Indigenous People](#)
 - [Sell off our public lands? It could happen if William Perry](#)



- [Pendley becomes BLM chief](#)
 - [Pendley plans an affront to Montana's conservation values](#)
 - [300 green groups say the senate has 'moral duty' to reject Trump's public lands nominee](#)
 - [Trump's nominee to oversee federal lands has 50 conflicts of interest](#)
 - [Trump picks an environmental saboteur to lead the Bureau of Land Management](#)
 - [The Bureau of Land Management headquarters is officially in Grand Junction, Colorado. The move cost the agency 70 percent of its staff.](#)
- The Trump administration has proposed a [roll back of rules on royalty payments](#), a move likely to boost profits for the extractive energy industry. The courts have rejected these efforts in the past.
 - The Trump administration has proposed a [relaxation of reporting regulations](#) for oil and gas operators on public lands.
 - Now that the Trump administration has rolled back the 50-year old National Environmental Policy Act, the "magna carta" of environmental laws, [two coalitions of environmental organizations have sued to keep the "public" in public lands](#).
 - As the Trump administration [seeks to fast-track the environmental permitting process](#), conservation groups say the public could be sidelined, which could potentially allow companies to minimize the impacts of their projects.
 - The time has come to [fix the broken non competitive oil and gas leasing system](#) for our public lands.
 - After pushback by local leaders, the [Bureau of Land Management canceled the September oil and gas lease sales](#) in or near prime recreation land in Grand and San Juan counties. The agency still plans [to move forward with leasing more than 27,000 acres in other parts of Utah](#).
 - After more than five years in the making, the [Bureau of Land Management has issued preliminary approval](#) for a 5,000-well oil and natural gas project on federal land in Wyoming.
 - Despite the downturn in the industry during COVID-19, [oil and gas leases sales continue in New Mexico](#).
 - Six environmental organizations have filed a [lawsuit against the Bureau of Land Management and the Interior Department to scrap a management plan](#) that will allow oil and gas drilling across public lands in southwestern Colorado.



- [The next president could reverse some of the Trump administration's decisions that weaken environmental protections. But it will take work.](#)
- After 30 years in the National Park Service, [David Vela, the de facto director of the agency, announced he is stepping down.](#)
- [The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs are hosting four virtual open houses](#) to solicit public comment that will guide natural resource management for public lands in New Mexico's San Juan, Arriba, McKinley and Sandoval counties, and public lands surrounding the Chaco Culture National Historical Park.
- [The State of Utah and the Environmental Protection Agency have reached a \\$220 million settlement](#) that resolves the State's legal claims arising out of the 2015 Gold King Mine release in southwest Colorado.

The Fight Against Climate Change

- [Salida, Colorado steps up to tackle climate change.](#)
- [Truckee, California reveals first climate vulnerability plan.](#)
- [Colorado and Utah offer us a glimpse of the impacts of climate change.](#)

- [A giant climate hotspot in Western Colorado and Eastern Utah is robbing the West of its water.](#)
- [Researchers say that last year was one of three warmest on record.](#)
- [Are hotter summers making the toxic algae that are filling Colorado lakes with slimy pea-green soup worse?](#)
- [A federal lab found a way to modernize the grid, reduce reliance on coal, and save consumers billions. Trump appointees blocked it.](#)
- The Trump administration formally [weakened a major climate-change regulation - effectively freeing oil and gas companies from the need to detect and repair methane leaks](#) - even as



new research shows that far more of the [potent greenhouse gas](#) is seeping into the atmosphere than previously known. [Lawsuits](#)

come next.

- Climate change is turbocharging fires, drought and tropical storms this summer.
- Wildfires are raging across the West.
 - A lightning strike sparked a wildfire not far from Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park, prompting crews to start protecting structures in the area of Old Faithful.
 - California is fighting 560 wildfires encompassing more than 771,000 acres largely as a result of an extraordinary spate of dry lightning. At last count, seven people have been killed and at least 12,000 structures destroyed. Here's why these wildfires are so extreme right now.
 - The Cameron Peak Fire in Larimer County, CO, which is burning in heavy timber stands over rugged terrain, has caused Rocky Mountain National Park to close off access to a remote northwestern swath of the park.



Photos: Celia Barotz, Anna Peterson

Founded in 2014, The Mountain Pact mobilizes local elected officials in over 50 Western mountain communities with outdoor recreation based economies to speak with a collective voice on federal climate, public lands, and outdoor recreation policy.

SUPPORT

www.themountainpact.org | info@themountainpact.org

Read the PDF version of this and other Mountain Pact updates [here](#).

