



The Mountain Pact

June 2020 Conservation Update



In June, the country continued to grapple with the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic as many states began to loosen restrictions. In this Conservation Update we report on some exciting news about the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA); The Mountain Pact's successful effort to convene virtual congressional meetings with over 20 local elected officials from our mountain communities; the indefinite re-appointment of William Perry Pendley as the Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) followed three weeks later by the Trump Administration nominating him to serve as Director; more Trump Administration decisions that reflect its anti-public lands and 'energy dominance' agenda; and more.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund and The Great American Outdoors Act

- Due to COVID, instead of hosting our annual Washington, D.C. fly-in this spring, The Mountain Pact convened meetings with over 20 Western local elected officials and congressional offices. County commissioners, mayors, and town/city council members took time to talk with members of their congressional delegation in California, Montana, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Arizona about the [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#), the [Great American Outdoors Act](#), the Department of Interior, and COVID relief among other topics. The Mountain Pact is pleased to have helped make these meetings possible.

- On June 17, 2020, by a vote of 73-25, the U.S. Senate passed the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), S.3422, which will provide \$900 million annually in offshore oil and gas revenues for LWCF. Following this historic vote, extensive media coverage included



- stories in the [Durango Herald](#), [Colorado Sun](#), [Denver Post](#), and the [Bozeman Daily Chronicle](#).
- Senator Bennet (D-CO), a co-sponsor of the legislation, issued a [news release](#) that featured quotes from Colorado mountain town mayors and an array of conservation and outdoor groups who support permanent funding for LWCF.
- This measure, the most significant conservation legislation in nearly half a century, is now in the House of Representatives, which has introduced a [companion bill, HR.7092](#). [House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer \(D-MD\) has said that the House will vote on the legislation before the end of July.](#)

How the Coronavirus Pandemic is Impacting our Mountain Communities

- Americans were eager to take to the road as states started to loosen Coronavirus restrictions. In communities with tourism based economies, [businesses are welcoming visitors with caution](#).
- [In Colorado, communities are developing their own approaches](#) to how to safely re-open to outdoor enthusiasts. [Federal land managers are also facing unique challenges](#) as they do their best to create a safe and enjoyable experience for the many visitors excited to leave their quarantining days behind.
- [Lake Tahoe and Truckee are welcoming visitors back](#) and encouraging them to help slow the spread of COVID-19 by wearing masks, recreating responsibly and maintaining social distancing.
- Because of unseasonably warm weather and ongoing drought, [communities and parks across the West are grappling with the increasing threat of wildfire](#). Great Sand Dunes National Park and

Preserve in Colorado and Zion National Park in Utah recently implemented fire restrictions.

- [In Nevada, officials are developing new firefighting protocols in response to the coronavirus as they plan for a big fire season](#) because of dry conditions, higher than average temperatures, and heavy fuel loads.



The Trump Administration Agenda

- On June 5, the [Trump Administration announced that Acting Director William Perry Pendley will remain in the position of Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) "indefinitely."](#) Although Mr. Pendley exercises the authority of a BLM Director, he has been appointed to the Acting Director position four times, which has allowed the administration to circumvent the Senate confirmation process.
 - In response to this decision, The Mountain Pact issued a [media statement](#) opposing this action, which was covered by the [Ark Valley Voice](#). Gallup Sun Publishing printed an [op-ed by Anna Peterson](#), the Executive Director of The Mountain Pact. Senator Jon Tester, (D-MT) issued a [statement](#), as did other senators, calling for the removal of Pendley. [A lawsuit challenging the legality of the appointment is pending.](#)
- Three weeks later, on June 26, the [Trump Administration nominated Mr. Pendley to serve as the Director of the BLM](#), which will trigger the Senate confirmation process.
 - Upon news of the nomination, The Mountain Pact released a statement: "It wouldn't be a Friday without another disastrous announcement for America's public lands from the Trump administration. During this pandemic, when communities are in the middle of dealing with an astronomical and unprecedented public health crisis, William Perry Pendley has continued the Trump administration's destructive polluters over people approach. With William Perry Pendley and Interior Secretary David Bernhardt at the helm, the Trump administration's greed is taking precedence over public health, strong economies, outdoor recreation, conservation, clean air, and clean water." You can read her [full statement here.](#)

- Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) released a [statement](#) in which he said, "I will oppose William Perry Pendley's nomination to become director of the Bureau of Land Management because his policies do not reflect Colorado's values and commitment to conservation. Someone who has spent their entire career opposed to the very idea of public lands is unfit to lead a land management agency."
- Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), one of the groups behind the lawsuit, [expressed opposition to the nomination.](#)"
- The internal watchdog for the Department of Interior [found that Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Doug Domenech violated federal laws](#) when he used his official email to urge the EPA to hire a member of his family. [This is the second time in six months Domenech broke federal ethics regulations.](#)
- [The Department of Interior is having a difficult time filling top positions at the BLM](#) despite assurances from officials that moving the agency headquarters from Washington, D.C. to Colorado would make it easier to recruit top talent. [More than half of the BLM staff in the D.C. office slated to relocate to Colorado left the agency.](#)
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- Earlier in the year as energy prices crashed because of the Coronavirus, the Department of Interior moved forward with a slew of oil and gas lease sales on public lands. In May and June, the [Trump administration backed off its regular oil and gas lease sale schedule, delaying a major sale in New Mexico and postponing at least two auctions that were scheduled for later in June.](#)
- As part of its September quarterly lease sale, the [Utah BLM office will offer 49 parcels containing 82,010 acres in the Moab/Monticello area](#), with many in locations that could set the stage for a conflict between energy development and highly valued recreation and protected natural areas.
- While tribes have been focused on managing Coronavirus relief efforts, [the BLM is proceeding with a plan for fracking and mineral leasing near Chaco Canyon.](#)
- [The Environmental Protection Agency announced a new rule](#) that limits the ability of states to use the Clean Water Act to review and stop new fossil-fuel infrastructure projects.
- [President Trump, citing the pandemic, signed an executive order](#)



instructing agencies to waive long-standing environmental laws to speed up federal approval for new mines, highways, pipelines, and other infrastructure projects. Practically speaking, this means agencies will be relieved of the requirements to solicit public feedback on proposed projects and analyze how federal decisions could hurt the environment.

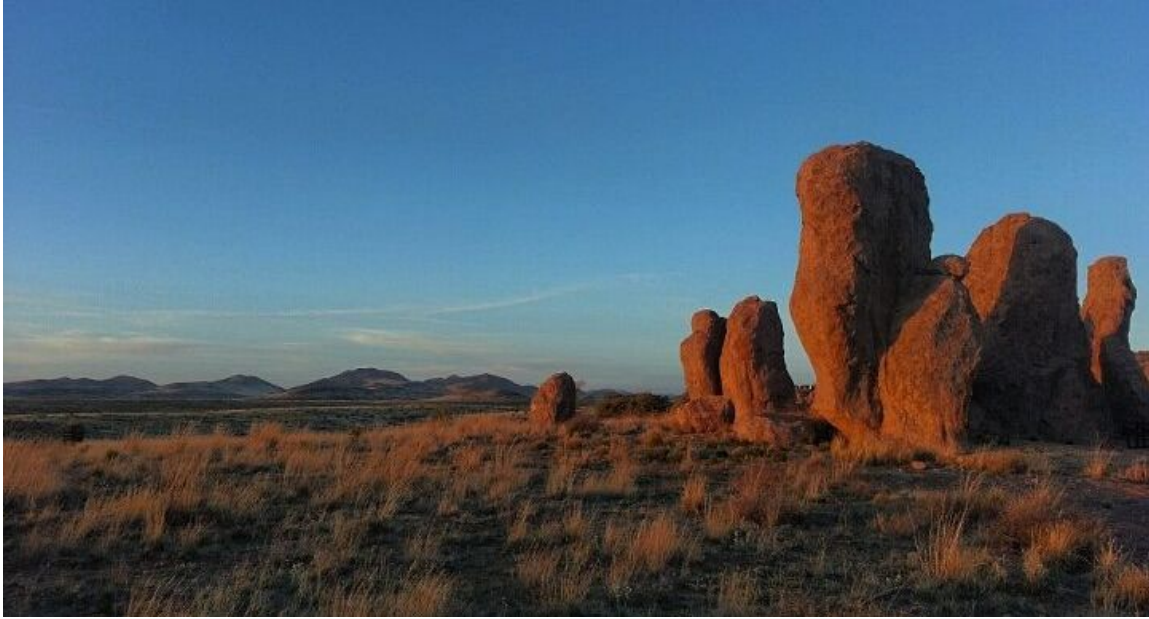
- The Trump administration has approved 117 applications from energy companies for relief from royalty and lease payments for oil and gas extraction from U.S. lands and the Gulf of Mexico during the coronavirus pandemic.



- A federal judge in Montana has thrown out a Trump administration directive that weakened an Obama-era policy protecting the Western sage grouse, invalidating hundreds of oil and gas leases on federal land in Montana and Wyoming.
- A retired California State Director of the BLM with nearly 40 years of experience at the BLM and Department of Interior writes that the leaders of the BLM are losing their way, "devaluing iconic landscapes, diminishing public participation, and catering to the financial ambitions of narrow, favored interests."
- In lawsuits over oil and gas leases, coal mining, and pipelines to transport fuels across the country, federal judges have ruled the Trump administration failed to address climate change and improperly downplayed or completely ignored potential environmental damage.

The Fight Against Climate Change

- The Trump administration is continuing its war on climate change science by asking agency employees to avoid using the term "climate change."
- Kim Langmaid, the Mayor Pro Tem on the Vail Town Council, writes about how Vail can use its collective imagination to focus on a long-term sustainable vision that includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions and generating economic development that protects and enhances the area's beautiful open spaces.
- New polls show that Coloradans strongly support for emissions reductions and most Americans believe the government should do more to combat climate change.



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