



# The Mountain Pact

## Conservation Update October 2020

In this Conservation Update, we report on a Mountain Pact letter, signed by 111 Colorado local elected officials, that urges Senator Gardner to take action on the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Economy Act (CORE Act); the ongoing challenges public land managers face because of COVID-19; the aftermath of the court decision that William Perry Pendley, the de facto leader of the Bureau of Land Management, has been serving in the post unlawfully; the relationship between the catastrophic wildfires raging across the West and climate change; a Mountain Pact Letter to Congress signed by nearly 70 local elected officials calling for a "Gateway Community Dividend" to be added to the PILT program; and more.



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### How COVID-19 is Impacting our Mountain Communities and Other Mountain Community News

- The Colorado Outdoor Recreation Economy (CORE) Act.
  - [The Mountain Pact mobilized 111 local elected officials from mountain communities across Colorado to send a letter to Senator Cory Gardner](#) imploring him to actively support the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act (CORE) Act.
  - [Colorado leaders urge Gardner to take action on the CORE Act.](#)
  - [It's time for Sen. Gardner to support the CORE Act.](#)
  - [The CORE Act could provide essential healing.](#)
  - [Senator Gardner should push the CORE Act over the finish line.](#)
  - [Gardner can contribute to Colorado's wilderness legacy.](#)

October 1, 2020

Dear Senator Gardner,

As local elected officials in Colorado, we write to implore you to actively support the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act. There is broad bipartisan support in Colorado for the protection of our public lands and this bill is the most broadly supported legislation to protect public lands in Colorado in a generation. It is supported by the majority of the Colorado congressional delegation and has passed the House of Representatives with bipartisan support *twice*. The CORE Act's inclusion in the House-passed version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) offers this Congress a critical opportunity to pass significant protections for Colorado public lands. As the Colorado Senator on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, we urge you to actively take up the CORE Act in the Senate this year.

COVID-19 has hit our mountain communities very hard. Some are struggling with 50% unemployment. Before the pandemic, 229,000 jobs in Colorado were in our state's outdoor recreation economy. As local elected officials who are tasked with helping our region's economy to recover, we know protecting our state's public lands permanently is an important part of the solution. The CORE Act will help our communities recover from the pandemic by bringing some of these people back to work.

Read the full letter [here](#).

- Public land managers continually face new challenges because of the pandemic.
  - Zion National Park managers [try to deal with unprecedented amounts of graffiti](#).
  - [Yosemite National Park will end its reservation system in November](#).
  - Because of record traffic in the South Platte forest district [a first-ever designated camping plan](#) is put in place.
  - State parks in Routt County, Colorado, had [more visitors than ever this summer, which turned out to be a double-edged sword](#).
  - [COVID-19 killed Utah's \\$10 billion travel and tourism industry](#) but it may be on the rebound.
- On [October 21, 2020](#) nearly 70 county commissioners, mayors, and council members from public land gateway communities in 11 western states sent a letter to their congressional offices asking them to add a Gateway Community Dividend to the [Payments in Lieu of Taxes](#) (PILT) program. The letter states: "To help gateway communities deal with additional costs, Congress should expand the PILT Program to include a 'Gateway Community Dividend,' which would add a 50 percent premium for every acre of permanently protected federal public lands to the current PILT formula. This dividend would be paid to counties with federally protected public lands within their jurisdiction, particularly lands that restrict extractive activity, such as wild & scenic rivers, wilderness areas, and national parks." [Buckrail Times](#) and the [Santa Fe New Mexican](#) covered the letter.





October 21, 2020

Dear U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives,

Our mountain communities have been hit hard by the economic downturn brought on by COVID-19. While some federal funding has been made available to state and local governments as part of the large spending package Congress passed earlier in the spring, we continue to wrestle with how we're going to build our county budgets so we can fund essential services for our constituents.

In 1976 Congress created the [Payments in Lieu of Taxes](#) (PILT) program, which requires the federal government to make annual payments to local governments to compensate them for property taxes not collected on lands owned by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and some military installations within their jurisdictions. These payments are a critical revenue source for local government budgets, funding vital services such as firefighting and police protection, public school and road construction, and search-and-rescue operations.

Our protected public lands are tremendous assets to our communities and support our growing outdoor recreation economies. However, increased visitation to our public lands has strained the infrastructure that accommodates these visitors. To help gateway communities like ours deal with additional costs, Congress should expand the PILT Program to include a 'Gateway Community Dividend,' which would add a 50 percent premium for every acre of permanently protected federal public lands to the current PILT formula. This dividend would be paid to counties with federally protected public lands within their jurisdiction, particularly lands that restrict extractive activity, such as wild & scenic rivers, wilderness areas, and national parks.

[Read the full letter here.](#)

- [30 x30](#) efforts to protect 30% of land and waters by 2030 gains traction in [Colorado](#) and [California](#).
- [Public lands provide Americans a refuge in these troubled times.](#)
- [Telluride converting gondola cars into dining cabins for the winter](#)

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## The Trump Administration Agenda

- The full extent of Trump's 'meat cleaver' assault on US wilderness
- More on the [Montana federal court ruling that William Perry Pendley has been serving illegally](#) as the de facto leader of the Bureau of Land Management.
  - The Mountain Pact's Executive Director, Anna Peterson, [weighs in on the decision to remove Pendley](#) in the Gallup Sun.
  - [Democrats seek to block appeal of court ruling ousting Pendley, BLM land plans.](#)
  - Pendley's removal from his role at the Bureau of Land Management [confirms concerns of the outdoor recreation community.](#)
  - [Interior Secretary Bernhardt says he will lead the Bureau of Land Management](#) after a federal judge ousted Pendley.
  - [After judges tell Trump that his officials are serving illegally, he does nothing.](#)
  - [The Trump administration's doubling down on Pendley is an affront to Montana.](#)
  - [The Trump administration says it will appeal the court decision that removed Pendley, the 'polarizing' public and chief.](#)
  - After ousting

William Pendley  
for unlawfully  
being the position  
of the director of  
the Bureau of  
Land  
Management, a  
[Montana judge  
blocked three  
land-use plans  
that would have](#)



[opened most federal lands in the state to energy development.](#)

- The federal court order blocking William Perry Pendley from exercising power as the head of the Bureau of Land Management [could threaten to unravel some major Trump administration.](#)
  - [Dozens of public lands decisions across the West could soon come under scrutiny in the federal courts](#) because of Pendley's involvement.
  - Trump administration lawyers say [no public land actions should be invalidated.](#)
  - [The dismissal of Pendley threatens Trump's "energy dominance" agenda.](#)
- Amid calls to reform the broken oil and gas leasing system, leases on public lands are for sale and the damage continues.
    - Taxpayer advocates call for [oil and gas lease reform.](#)
    - [Utah's economy is threatened by the current federal leasing binge.](#)
    - [Nevada's outdoor recreation economy is under threat from oil leasing.](#)
    - [The Bureau of Land Management plans to offer oil and gas lease sales for 20 parcels totaling 24,940 acres in Nye County, Nevada.](#)
    - [Thousands oppose the first federal oil lease sale in California in eight years.](#)
    - [Senator Bennet introduces bills](#) to bring accountability to oil and gas extraction.
    - [Colorado's public lands deserve better](#) than an antiquated oil and gas leasing system.
    - [Myanmar-born 'dreamer' buys U.S. drilling leases](#) as the fossil fuel industry struggles.
  - The Trump administration's ongoing pursuit of fracking in the Chaco region of New Mexico despite strong opposition.
    - [The Trump administration's plans to frack in the Chaco region](#) should be stopped.
    - [Will New Mexico's Chaco region be sacrificed for U.S. energy dominance?](#)



- [Tribes and archaeologists are trying to identify sites in Greater Chaco to protect from oil and gas development.](#)
- [Secretary of Interior Bernhardt won't delay oil and gas development near Chaco.](#)
- [Airborne radioactivity increases downwind of fracking, study finds.](#)



- The federal government continues its [misguided policy of providing COVID-19 relief to the oil and gas industry.](#)
  - A study shows that amid COVID-19, [billions of government relief dollars have gone to oil and gas companies.](#)
  - A U.S. government watchdog agency is [criticizing the Trump administration's handling of a COVID-19 relief effort](#) that awarded energy companies breaks on over 500 payments for oil and gas extracted from public lands in Western states.
  - A congressional watchdog said there's [no evidence that the Interior Department's move to aid drilling companies by slashing royalty rates actually worked.](#) Read The Mountain Pact's media statement response [here.](#)
  - Critics say that the [federal government's purchase of oil companies' debt is a bailout.](#)
  - States faces [billions in well plugging costs](#) as Fed buys millions in oil and gas bonds.
  - It's unclear if [royalty reductions given to oil producers prevented shut downs.](#)
  - Despite owing the federal government almost \$4 million in unpaid natural gas royalties, [a bankrupt natural gas company is receiving royalty relief under the Bureau of Land Management COVID-19 relief policy.](#)
- The Trump administration's ongoing assault on the environment.
  - A glimpse into [how terrible the Trump administration is on the environment.](#)
  - Five major ways that the [Department of Interior has slashed protections for wildlife.](#)
  - [75 ways Trump made America dirtier and the planet warmer.](#)



## The Fight Against Climate Change

- [As Colorado wildfires burn, fears that climate change is causing multi-level emergency mount.](#)
- [East Troublesome Fire's an 'unprecedented' blowup a sign of Colorado's grim climate future](#)
- [Cameron Peak is now the largest fire in Colorado history.](#)
- [In Colorado, It Feels Like a Fire Season Without End](#)
- [National forests close in five Colorado counties due to unprecedented fire conditions.](#)
- [East Troublesome Fire: Two killed, no other missing people reported.](#)
- [Colorado's Grizzly Creek fire shows how climate change is threatening transportation routes.](#)
- [All of Colorado is under drought status for the first time since 2013.](#)
- [Record temperatures have drawn 'heat tourists' to Death Valley National Park.](#)
- [Wildfire smoke in US exposes millions to hazardous pollution](#)
- [Smoky Skies Are The New Normal. Are They Making Us Sick?](#)
- [Wildfires are showing how climate change is transforming national parks.](#)
- [Yosemite National Park reopens](#) after it closed because of wildfire smoke.
- [For 100 years wildfire was the enemy.](#) It could have been an ally.
- [The photos of wildfires and smoke don't show you everything.](#)
- [Record wildfires on the West Coast are capping a disastrous decade.](#)
- [Why we will have to learn to live with smoke.](#)
- [Climate disruption is now locked in.](#) The next moves will be crucial.
- [The infernos in the West are changing our sense of how fire works.](#)
- Alarmed by the scope of wildfires, [officials turn to Native Americans for help.](#)
- [A court strikes down the Obama-era rule targeting methane leaks on public lands.](#)
- [The number of global methane hot spots has soared this year](#) despite the economic slowdown.
- [Western politicians from both parties support a wildfire bill.](#)
- Amid U.S. climate disasters, [a report by the Trump administration touts oil and gas as 'energy security' amid US climate disasters.](#)
- [The Trump administration is fueling future climate disasters](#) by continuing to turn over pristine public lands to private fossil fuel developers at a breakneck pace.
- Colorado's Governor Jarid Polis and New Mexico's Governor Michele Lujan [write about how states can lead clean on climate action and clean energy.](#)



## The Land and Water Conservation Fund

- More land and water conservation projects made possible because of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
  - [Arizona's Prescott National Forest gains 84 acres on the Verde River.](#)
  - [Idaho's Caribou-Targhee National Forest acquires a priority inholding.](#)
  - [The Bureau of Land Management has acquired land along Colorado's Gunnison River](#) that will increase access.
  - [New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns could get LWCF funding](#) to upgrade the water and sewer system at the park, rehabilitate historical structures and replace the asphalt in the underground trails with concrete.



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## New Movie by Patagonia

- [Patagonia has released a terrific new documentary film, "Public Trust" which tells the story of President Trump stealing American land.](#) You can watch it [here](#).



Photos by Anna Peterson

*Founded in 2014, [The Mountain Pact](#) mobilizes local elected officials in over 75 Western mountain communities with outdoor recreation based economies to speak with a collective voice on federal climate, public lands, and outdoor recreation policy.*

SUPPORT

