



The Mountain Pact

April Conservation Update

March and April 2020 will go down in history as the time when COVID-19 gripped our country, upending life as we know it, and causing severe economic dislocation and uncertainty for almost everyone. Against this very unsettling backdrop, we continue to monitor Congress as it focuses



on how to best help the American people through this national emergency.

[The Great American Outdoors Act, S.3422](#), which would fully and permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), remains in the queue for consideration by the Senate and House. We report here on some of the very positive media S.

3422 has received; how COVID-19 is impacting our mountain communities; the Trump administration's relentless pursuit of its 'energy dominance' agenda; and much more.

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

- Since S. 3422 was introduced in the Senate in March, it has been widely praised. One editorial, "[Bipartisan Triumph to Raise our Spirits](#)" said, "Three cheers for the Republicans and Democrats who are joining to preserve and improve America's greatest treasures." Another editorial, "[Amid Coronavirus Response Congress Must Support Parks and Open Space Fund](#)" noted, "Fully funding LWCF is also a low-cost economic stimulus that will reach all corners of the country, yielding direct and indirect benefits."
- [The Mountain Pact](#) has been reaching out to local elected officials in our mountain communities asking for their support by signing onto a letter encouraging Congress to include full and permanent funding for LWCF in a future stimulus bill as a way to help gateway communities and states with outdoor recreation driven economies recover from the crisis.



How COVID-19 is Impacting our Mountain Communities

- The past several weeks have presented unprecedented challenges as our mountain communities have confronted the spread of the Coronavirus. In Colorado, Governor Polis acted decisively to protect the public health by issuing an [executive order](#) closing all ski resorts in the state. After the order was issued, it became evident that [recreation based counties were more vulnerable to COVID-19](#) than other rural areas simply because they draw so many visitors from across the globe.
- With so many states issuing stay at home orders, [thousands started crowding into national parks](#) after Secretary of Interior Bernhardt waived entrance fees and encouraged visitors. Confusion ensued as the Secretary failed to decisively close all parks. Some [park staff have tested positive for the virus](#) and continue to feel afraid. Each park superintendent must decide whether to close although the Secretary has failed to provide clear guidance or protocols to help them make their decision. Across the country, some parks have completely closed while others remain open. Before you visit a park, it's best to check the website for the latest information.
- Communities including Moab and Bozeman have expressed the real fear that their hospitals simply won't be able to handle a sharp increase in cases. In an effort to stem the spread of the virus and prevent their local health care resources from being overwhelmed, a large number of tourist communities including [Gunnison County](#), [Mammoth County](#), and [Moab](#), which normally embrace visitors, have urged them to postpone their visits.



The Trump Administration Agenda

- Amid the pandemic, the Trump administration is forging ahead with its 'energy dominance' and [anti-public lands agendas](#) as well as [regulatory rollbacks](#), while the public is distracted by the public health crisis.
 - On April 16, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [weakened the rule governing the release of mercury](#) from oil and coal-fired power plants, one of the most significant regulatory rollbacks achieved by the Trump administration.
 - It's business as usual with oil and gas lease sales and rule making. On April 3, President Trump [met with oil executives](#) to discuss the crash in the price of oil and whether he could help

the beleaguered industry dealing with a glut of crude oil. Prior to the meeting, 40 House Republicans wrote to President Trump asking him to [reduce the royalties for producers](#) who drill on federal lands.

- On March 31, the EPA [rolled back fuel efficiency standards](#), which will increase carbon dioxide emissions and lead to the worsening of the effects of climate change.
- On Feb 19, the EPA took another action designed to boost the struggling coal industry by proposing to [ease the regulations governing coal ash](#), which are designed to protect the public health and the environment.
- On April 3, Secretary of Interior David Bernhardt [extended the appointment of William Perry Pendley Perry](#), a well-known anti-public lands activist, as acting director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) until May 5. This extension once again questions the legality of keeping someone in a critical position for so long without Senate confirmation. *In prior [Conservation Updates](#), we have reported on Acting Director Pendley's controversial July 2019 initial appointment and re-appointments and decision to move the [BLM headquarters](#) from Washington, DC to Grand Junction, CO.*

- Secretary of Interior Bernhardt and Acting BLM Director Pendley are [exploiting this public health crisis](#) to stop the public from weighing in on critically important rule making processes. [Senate Democrats](#), a coalition of groups representing governors, state lawmakers and municipalities, as well as conservationists [have all asked the administration to pause this non-critical work](#) during the COVID-19



pandemic until danger has passed and the public can safely gather. At this point it seems unlikely the administration will accede to the request.

- [The BLM has approved a controversial resource management plan](#) for 675,800 acres of public lands and 971,220 acres of federal mineral estate in Southwest Colorado. [The BLM describes the plan as "balanced."](#) Critics, including conservationists and U.S. Senator Michael Bennet, argue that the plan's emphasis on energy development, which could result in a significant increase in fracking, is misguided. Colorado's Gunnison, Ouray, and San Miguel counties; the town of Paonia, CO; and citizen and conservation groups have filed protests.

The 50th Anniversary of Earth Day

April 22, 2020 is the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day in 1970, which

many credit as the beginning of the environmental movement. Because of the Coronavirus, [Earth Day 2020 is going all digital](#) but that doesn't mean the enthusiasm is any less for the event.

- One of the many [Earth Day activities](#) you can engage in from the safety of your home is watching the new and compelling [PBS Earth Day documentary](#) that examines the scientific evidence of the impact of global warming and possible solutions to the crisis. The one-hour special, hosted by natural historian Sir David Attenborough, airs at 8 p.m. (check local listings) on PBS, PBS.org, and the PBS Video App.
- You can also participate in many [Earth Day Live](#) activities from Wednesday, April 22 to Friday, April 24. Hear from activists, performers, thought leaders, and artists during this 3-day online event.

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