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Officials from 11 states call on congress to fully fund Land and Water Conservation Fund

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Members of local governments from around Truckee-Tahoe joined more than a hundred county commissioners, mayors, and city and town council members from 11 western states in sending a letter to their congressional delegations urging them to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
Courtesy of Tahoe City Downtown Association

Earlier this month, 151 county commissioners, mayors, and city and town council members from 11 western states sent a letter to their congressional delegations urging them to fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The fund, which was created by Congress in 1964, uses offshore oil and gas revenues to provide money for the conservation and preservation of federal, state, and local public lands and waters.

A number of members of Truckee's local government inked their names to the letter, including Town of Truckee Mayor David Tirman, and council members Anna Klovstad, David Polivy, and Jessica Abrams. Truckee Town Council Member Morgan Goodwin, who recently announced he is resigning from the position in August, also penned his name to the letter, joining officials from South Lake Tahoe and Mammoth Lakes.

“The economic boost from increased public lands protection and improved outdoor access is real,” said Town of Mammoth Lakes Council Member John Wentworth in a statement. “The bottom line is that people are revitalized by nature and the outdoors. LWCF funding is a primary source of providing spaces for that revitalization.”

“The Land and Water Conservation Fund has been indispensable in public lands conservation in the United States since its passage in 1964,” said Anna Peterson, executive director of The Mountain Pact, the organization which helped lead the letter, in a news release. “The (Land and Water Conservation Fund) has funded projects in every county in the United States, helping to support the $887 billion outdoor recreation industry, and the economies of our western mountain communities.”

The fund expired in September 2018 and was reauthorized in the House of Representatives and Senate last March via the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. President Donald Trump’s 2020 budget, however, would slash the program’s budget by 95%, according to a report by the Summit Daily in Colorado.

“The Department of Interior’s 2020 budget, released (last March) cuts federal funding for (the Land and Water Conservation Fund) by 95 percent and would devastate the National Park Service by eliminating hundreds of jobs from park operations and cutting major funds from maintenance and park management,” Rep. Joe Neguse (D-Boulder) wrote in a statement to the Summit Daily. “The president’s budget … would have a detrimental impact on our economy, our public lands and the American people.”

In 2018, the National Parks Service estimated it spent more than $400 million on conservation activities across the country, according to a report from the Department of Interior, with the majority of money going toward controlling invasive species. Of the more than $400 million spent by the parks service, roughly $150 million was provided to state and local governments through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The fund is authorized at an annual level of $900 million, according to the Department of the Interior, but Congress typically appropriates only a portion that amount. Congress has appropriated full funding to support conservation and recreation projects one time in the history of the fund, diverting the rest for other purposes.

Since expiring in 2018, the fund lost more than $350 million, according to The Mountain Pact, which could have been used for conservation, enhancement, and protection of public lands and waterways.

“(Land and Water Conservation Fund) funding doesn’t cost taxpayers one penny,” said Avon, Colorado, Mayor Sarah Smith-Hymes in a statement. “The money comes from a small fraction of the royalties paid by oil and gas companies to drill offshore,”

The letter sent to Congress, which urges the full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, was signed by representatives from 45 towns, cities, and counties. Nineteen full county commissions and/or city councils also signed onto the letter. In total, those that signed on represent more than 1.25 million year-round residents and more than 56 Million annual visitors.

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