



Hikers in the Wind Rivers Range. Photo by Francisco "Karate Kid" Miller

On January 17, the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee will hold hearings on Montana Congressman Ryan Zinke's appointment as the Secretary of Interior. When Congressman Zinke faces the committee, the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC) encourages him to show support of public lands and funding the land management agencies and programs that support them. These program and their managing agencies help support some of the greatest conservation programs of our generation, like completion of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT). Spanning 3,100 miles from Canada to Mexico, the CDT provides a unique opportunity to connect people with their most intimate experience with one of the most important landscapes of the North American continent- the Continental Divide that creates both the Atlantic and Pacific Watersheds.

National Trails, like the CDT, are public lands that afford millions of Americans inspiring outdoor recreation and educational experiences both close to home and in the remotest deserts, highest mountains, and along some of the wildest rivers of our land while also protecting critical habitat and travel corridors for wildlife. These trails help to vividly tell the stories of all the major ethnic and cultural communities that comprise the rich diversity of our Nation in the places where critical times in their histories occurred. They span the history of our Nation from the time of Native-American control of the continent thru European discovery and colonial rule to Euro-American settlement of the West. They also provide opportunities to support local economies, especially here in the remote American West.

The CDT is part of a public lands system and one of the most ambitious and innovative ventures in large- scale collaborative stewardship of our public heritage in American

history. CDTC feels strongly that the CDT and the programs and agencies that support it demand continued investment by our federal land management agencies and their leadership because conservation of America's public lands is an investment in the land that sustains us and in our people who care for the land.

The CDT is developed and sustained through scores of long-term partnerships between the Federal agencies, State and local governments, Indian tribes, non-profit and local community partners. The handful of Federal staff who administer and manage the CDT program rely on the contributions of thousands of citizen volunteers to make them available for public enjoyment and reinvigoration. Over the past 15 years, the CDT volunteer community has contributed over \$7.2 Million dollars worth of volunteer labor and over 650,000 volunteer hours to build and maintain the CDT.

In 2016, the Continental Divide Trail Coalition underwent our first ever Strategic Planning effort. Of the many outcomes of the process, we heard loud and clear from our stakeholders that protection and completion of the CDT should be our primary focus. We also heard that maintaining public access to the CDT was critical, and continued federal ownership of the lands the CDT traverses was worth fighting for. Today the CDT is 95 % complete and we are closer than ever to fully realizing our focus of completing the CDT. To complete the remaining 250 miles of Trail will require support of our Congressional and Agency leadership, funding of our federal agency partners and, most importantly, sustaining programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

As a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee, we also encourage Colorado Senator Cory Gardner to pose questions to Congressman Zinke in order to gauge his true commitment to our public lands and these programs so valued by westerners and visitors alike. Senator Gardner has been a true leader for access to our public lands and we count on him now in his role on the committee. We hope Congressman Zinke, will follow in the footsteps of the strong leaders before him and help complete and protect the CDT Trail Corridor and ensure the Trail corridor, as well as all of our public lands, remain a pristine and untrammled landscape not only today but for future generations to enjoy.



Teresa Ana Martinez
Executive Director,
Continental Divide Trail Coalition