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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONGRESS FAILS TO REAUTHORIZE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Golden, Co. (Dec. 20, 2018) – Yesterday, the Senate passed a Continuing Resolution to keep the federal government operating through February 8, 2019, but failed to reauthorize the highly successful Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) as part of this budget deal despite strong bipartisan pressure to do so. For over 50 years, LWCF has been America’s most important conservation program, protecting our parks, trails and rivers for future generations. However, despite calls for permanent reauthorization and dedicated funding of the popular program from both sides of the aisle in the House, Senate, and from citizens across America, Congress allowed LWCF to expire on September 30 of this year. Now, Congress will go home for 2018 without reauthorizing LWCF, shirking their responsibility yet again.

“LWCF has a proven track record of more than 50 years of protecting our public lands and waters, from National Scenic Trails like the CDT to community parks and playgrounds,” said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition. “In the Rocky Mountain West, the effect that public lands have on our economy and our quality of life is abundantly clear, and so is the bipartisan support for LWCF. We are deeply frustrated that Congress has yet again passed the buck on reauthorizing this crucial conservation program, leaving the work undone until 2019.”

The Continental Divide Trail runs for 3,100 miles along the Continental Divide through Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado and New Mexico. While it was designated by Congress as a National Scenic Trail in 1978, it is still incomplete due to a lack of public land access in several areas along the Trail. Without the funding that LWCF provides for conservation, it is unlikely that the CDT will ever be completed.

Many legislators who represent CDT states have been vocal advocates for LWCF reauthorization and dedicated funding, including New Mexico Senators Martin Heinrich and Tom Udall, Colorado Senators Michael Bennet and Cory Gardner, Montana Senators Jon Tester and Steve Daines, New Mexico Representatives Ben Ray Luján and Michelle Lujan Grisham, and Colorado Representative Ed Perlmutter.

Senator Heinrich was one of several legislators to speak at a press conference on Capitol Hill calling for LWCF reauthorization in late November. “The Land and Water Conservation Fund is America’s most successful conservation program. LWCF expands opportunities for outdoor traditions like hunting, camping, and fishing that are among the pillars of Western culture,” said Heinrich.

Despite widespread support for the legislation, Republican leadership in Congress refused to allow LWCF reauthorization and other public lands bills to be voted on this week.

“While we thank Senators Gardner and Daines for their support on LWCF, their majority party failed to reinstate this critical tool for conservation,” said Martinez. “Our public lands have already lost out on almost \$200 million, we’ve seen broad support from across the political spectrum, yet they couldn’t get it done. We’re calling on Senators Gardner and Daines to use their leadership to make LWCF reauthorization and full funding a top priority in the next Congress.”



The Continental Divide Trail may never be completed without reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
Photo by David Lingle.



“As a small business owner that depends on the CDT and other public lands, I am upset that Congress has once again failed to save LWCF,” said Andrew Walker, co-owner of 7,000 Feet Running Company in Salida, Colorado. “This is important to me and to so many other Americans who value our public lands. I want my representatives in Congress to permanently reauthorize and fully fund LWCF as quickly as possible in the new year.”

About the Continental Divide Trail

The CDT is one of the world’s premiere long-distance trails, stretching 3,100 miles from Mexico to Canada along the Continental Divide. Designated by Congress in 1978, the CDT is the highest, most challenging and most remote of the 11 National Scenic Trails. It provides recreational opportunities ranging from hiking to horseback riding to hunting for thousands of visitors each year. While 95% of the CDT is located on public land, approximately 150 miles are still in need of protection.

About the Continental Divide Trail Coalition

The CDTC was founded in 2012 by volunteers and recreationists hoping to provide a unified voice for the Trail. Working hand-in-hand with the U.S. Forest Service and other federal land management agencies, the CDTC is a non-profit partner supporting stewardship of the CDT. The mission of the CDTC is to complete, promote and protect the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, a world-class national resource. For more information, please visit continentaldivide-trail.org.

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