CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL COALITION CALLS FOR END TO GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Golden, Co. (Jan. 16, 2019) – As the partial government shutdown approaches the one-month mark with no end in sight, the number of ways in which it is negatively impacting public lands like the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT) continues to grow. The CDT is managed by the U.S. Forest Service, and traverses almost 3,000 miles of federal land managed by the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service, agencies that have all seen the vast majority of their employees furloughed during the shutdown. Employees of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC), a non-profit organization, are still at work, but are deeply concerned about the impacts of the shutdown.

“First and foremost, we’re concerned for the wellbeing and economic security of the many federal agency partners we work with to protect the Continental Divide Trail. Our friends and colleagues work hard to serve the American public, yet they’re going without paychecks until this is resolved,” said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the CDTC. “Additionally, the impacts on the trail and our public lands cannot be understated. We’ve heard reports of snowmobilers illegally using non-motorized trails, where the actions of just a few individuals can cause irreversible damage to wildlife and habitat. National parks have been directed to use recreation fees to stay open, a short-sighted solution that will only worsen the $12 billion of deferred maintenance already plaguing our nation’s most treasured places. Such problems will only worsen as the shutdown continues.”

The Continental Divide Trail has remained open during the shutdown, but visitor services, maintenance and other management activities have been stopped or severely limited on the federal lands along the Trail. Reports of vandalism, illegal camping, and overflowing trash in national parks and forests have been widespread during the shutdown, especially in warmer climes like Joshua Tree National Park. But Morgan Anderson, Field Programs Manager for the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, notes that the shutdown may have less visible impacts that could affect public lands even after the shutdown is over.

“Normally, at this time of year, I’m in close contact with our agency partners to determine what our highest priority maintenance needs are along the trail and then set dates for our volunteer projects,” said Anderson. “With no one around to have those conversations with, all that work is on hold. If I can’t get that information out to our volunteers and funders in a timely manner, it could easily impact our ability to recruit volunteers, run projects, and ultimately, complete much-needed maintenance along the CDT in 2019.”

Additionally, the focus on reopening the government has shifted the conversation away from efforts to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a critical funding tool for conservation that Congress allowed to expire in September of last year. The Continental Divide Trail Coalition has noted in previous statements that reauthorization and funding of LWCF is critical to the eventual completion of the CDT, which has several gaps along its length due to a lack of access to public land. Prior to the government shutdown, several Senators representing CDT states, including Colorado Senator Cory Gardner, Montana Senators Jon Tester and Steve Daines, and New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich, fought for the passage of a public lands package that included LWCF reauthorization, but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell refused to allow the package to come to a vote.
“Our government needs to get back to work,” said Martinez. “We applaud Senator Gardner for calling for an end to the shutdown, but in the midst of our nation’s longest ever government shutdown, rhetoric is not enough. As a member of the majority party who recognizes the importance of reopening the government, we urge Senator Gardner to file a motion to end the shutdown – it’s not necessary to wait for Senator McConnell on this.”

**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 continentaldividetrail.org.

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