CDTC STATEMENT ON LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND PERMANENT FUNDING ACT

GOLDEN, CO. (Apr. 9, 2019) – Today, a bipartisan group of Senators introduced a measure that would dedicate full, permanent funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Over its 55-year history, this critical tool for conservation has helped protect irreplaceable landscapes in every American state and provided outdoor recreation opportunities for countless Americans.

With the passage of the John D. Dingell Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act earlier this year, Congress voted by an overwhelming bipartisan majority to permanently reauthorize LWCF, ensuring that this program will continue to help us protect our most treasured places for future generations. That legislation, however, didn’t include any guaranteed funding for LWCF. When the program was created in 1964, Congress called for $900 million of federal oil and gas leasing revenues to be dedicated annually to LWCF. Yet almost every year, Congress breaks its own promise to Americans and diverts much of this funding to other uses. The legislation introduced today aims to prevent that from happening by taking LWCF out of the annual Congressional appropriations process, a prudent long-term solution to the problem.

“Because of remaining gaps in public lands, the Continental Divide Trail needs LWCF if we ever want to see the trail completed,” said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the non-profit Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC). “In the Rocky Mountain West, public lands are crucial to our region’s economy and our quality of life. We’re pleased to see legislators who understand that leading the way once more in pushing for mandatory full funding of LWCF, including Senator Gardner and his Western colleagues who are cosponsoring the bill – Senator Bennet from Colorado, Senators Heinrich and Udall from New Mexico, and Senators Tester and Daines from Montana.”

Last month, just one day before signing the law that permanently reauthorized LWCF, President Trump proposed a 2020 budget that included zero funding for the program. Congress, meanwhile, is currently working through the appropriations process to draft their 2020 budget. Under current law, this is the process by which LWCF will receive its funding for the year. In 2019, Congress funded the program at just $425 million, less than half of the $900 million the program is supposed to receive.

“While Congress has the final say in creating the federal budget each year, the President’s budget signals the administration’s priorities – and clearly, LWCF is not one of them,” said Martinez. “We applaud Senator Gardner’s efforts today to ensure that LWCF is fully funded in the future, but he also needs to stand up to his party and ensure that LWCF is fully funded right now. Coloradans are calling upon Senator Gardner to lead the way in making sure that LWCF is fully funded for 2020 in Congress’ budget.”

The full text of the legislation can be found here. 

LWCF has been used to protect land all over the United States, such as parts of Colorado’s Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest. Photo by Mike Henrick.
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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