ROCKY MOUNTAIN BUSINESSES CALL ON CONGRESS TO PRIORITIZE PUBLIC LANDS

GOLDEN, Colo. (Oct. 4, 2019) – This week, more than 200 Rocky Mountain business leaders from New Mexico, Colorado, and Montana released open letters to their congressional delegations calling on Congress to provide full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In the letters, the business owners urged legislators representing the Rocky Mountain West to lead their colleagues in the House and Senate in passing legislation that would stop Congress from diverting funding away from public lands.

LWCF functions as a bank account for public lands, using revenues the federal government receives from offshore oil and gas leasing to invest in resources like parks, playgrounds, and trails. The program was made permanent with passage of a public lands law known as the Dingell Act this March, but funding remains subject to the whims of Congress during the annual appropriations process. Almost every year, Congress uses some of the funds set aside for LWCF for other purposes. More than $22 billion has been diverted from LWCF over its 55-year lifespan.

"While permanent reauthorization of LWCF was an important step forward," wrote the business owners, "the Dingell Act didn't include any provision for a dedicated funding stream for LWCF – and a fund with no funding isn't the victory our public lands deserve."

The business leaders represent a wide swath of industries and rural and urban communities alike. Some run well-known companies like Golden, Colorado's AC Golden Brewing (a subsidiary of MillerCoors), while others are restaurant owners, self-employed web designers, and medical professionals. Mary Johnston, Executive Director of the Anaconda Chamber of Commerce in western Montana, explained why LWCF funding is important to businesses that aren't directly tied to the outdoor recreation economy.

"LWCF makes a big difference in local communities and improves our quality of life," said Johnston. "Anaconda has used these funds to support projects including paving our Lower Works Trail to make it accessible to more people, building our skate park, and rebuilding the tennis courts."

The business owners released the letters soon after the Senate Interior Appropriations Committee proposed to fund LWCF at just $465 million in 2020. That's less than the House's proposed number of $524 million, and barely more than half of the $900 million that the fund is supposed to receive each year.

In the letters, the business leaders call on their members of Congress to champion legislation guaranteeing funding for LWCF at the $900 million level, which would prevent Congress from continuing to divert funds away from the program. This legislation was introduced by a bipartisan group of Senators and Representatives earlier this year, including all six of the Senators representing these states, but has not yet been voted on. As members of the majority party in the Senate, Colorado Senator Cory Gardner and Montana Senator Steve Daines have a critical role to play in ensuring that the legislation does indeed make it past the Senate floor.

"When Congress created LWCF, they made a promise to the American people that money from oil and gas drilling would be used to protect public lands for all of us," said Patrick Webber, co-founder of Denver-based Fourpoints Bar. "We need Congress to follow through on its commitment by prioritizing our public lands through the LWCF."
You can read the full letters and see the lists of signatories online for New Mexico, Colorado, and Montana.

**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 180 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 organization 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](http://continentaldividetrail.org).

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