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CDT COALITION APPLAUDS STEP TOWARD FULL FUNDING OF LWCF, CALLS FOR FULL FUNDING IN 2020

GOLDEN, Colo. (November 19, 2019) – Today, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee voted with a strong bipartisan majority for dedicated, permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). In the last 55 years, LWCF has protected and improved public lands in every county in the U.S., providing critical funding for projects ranging from community swimming pools to state parks to national trails and forests.

“Fully funding LWCF is critical to our efforts to complete the Continental Divide Trail,” said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition. “We are heartened by the bipartisan passage of the full funding bill through committee and urge leadership to bring it for a full vote as soon as possible. The permanent reauthorization of LWCF earlier this year was a huge step forward, but a fund without funding simply doesn’t make sense – and it doesn’t help us build trail.”

The Land and Water Conservation Fund uses revenues from offshore oil and gas leasing – not taxpayer dollars – to fund local, state, and federal outdoor projects, and an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Congress voted to make the program permanent earlier this year with passage of the Dingell Act. Yet almost every year since the creation of LWCF in 1964, Congress has used money intended for LWCF for other purposes. So far, more than $22 billion has been diverted away from America’s public lands this way. Proposed funding levels for LWCF in the House and Senate’s current 2020 budgets would add more than $400 million to that total – money that is supposed to be spent on public lands, trails, and community centers.

“LWCF is currently slated to receive about half of the funding it is supposed to receive in 2020,” said Martinez. “As budget negotiations continue, LWCF champions like Senator Steve Daines and Senator Cory Gardner need to press Senate leadership to fully fund LWCF now, not just when this long overdue bill becomes law.”

As the outdoor recreation economy continues to outpace overall economic growth across the West, LWCF has become even more important to Western voters. A recent survey showed that 97% of small business owners in communities along the Continental Divide believe that protecting public lands is important to the well-being of their local economies. It should come as no surprise, then, that a full 98% of them want Congress to provide full, permanent funding for LWCF.

“Countless communities in the West depend on public lands to sustain their economies,” said Martinez. “That’s why the certainty provided by guaranteed funding for LWCF is so critical. We hope that this marks one more step on the path to finally providing LWCF with the funding the American people and our public lands deserve.”

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 continentaldivide.org.

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