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What They Are Saying: Senate Passes Gardner’s Great American Outdoors Act

Historic conservation legislation fully funds the LWCF, addresses maintenance backlog on federal lands

Washington, D.C. – Last week the U.S. Senate passed the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act, introduced by U.S. Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Joe Manchin (D-WV), which fully funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and addresses the approximately \$20 billion maintenance backlog on federal public lands. This historic vote earned praise from leading conservation groups in Colorado and across the country.

What conservation leaders are saying:

“This common-sense legislation is long overdue to help our national parks and other public lands meet the burgeoning demand of increased numbers of hikers, anglers, campers, and wildlife watchers who have been flocking to Colorado’s outdoor spaces in recent years. As recent polling has shown, Westerners deeply value their public lands and want to ensure they are restored and conserved for their children and grandchildren to enjoy,” **said Suzanne O’Neill, Executive Director of the Colorado Wildlife Federation.**

“This is a historic deal reflecting the broad, bipartisan support for our public lands. The Great American Outdoors Act will be one of the biggest conservation victories in generations, solidifying our investments in this country’s outdoor economy and putting an end to the constant raiding of resources intended for LWCF. We applaud our congressional champions and the administration for finding common ground and

working together to ensure future generations will have access to close-to-home recreation,” **said Tom Cors, Director of Government Relations for Lands at The Nature Conservancy.**

“We are heartened to see this bill at such a pivotal time for our planet. Fully and permanently funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund and caring for America’s National Parks and public lands are two sides of the same coin. LWCF protects public lands and makes them accessible, while restoring our parks makes sure those places are safe and enjoyable. Addressing these important issues together makes sense, has bipartisan support, and will go a long way toward ensuring that one of America’s greatest legacies—our public lands and waters—are kept healthy and thriving for all to enjoy. This would be an enormous conservation victory for our nation, finally fulfilling the promise of LWCF after 54 years and doing the right thing for future generations,” **said Sally Jewell, Board Member of the Nature Conservancy, Secretary of the Interior (2013-2017).**

“Today the Senate delivered a historic win for the conservation of America’s natural landscapes,” **said Jennifer Morris, Chief Executive Officer at The Nature Conservancy.** “This bill would make major investments in the landscapes and landmarks vital to our economic, emotional and societal well-being. By protecting important natural spaces and investing in their care, this bill will help create jobs, rebuild local economies and expand access to the outdoors that everyone has a right to enjoy.”

“Senate passage of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) is a remarkable achievement in advancing historic bipartisan legislation for our national parks. The National Park Foundation thanks Senator Gardner for his unwavering support of incredible places like Rocky Mountain National Park, and for his commitment to the future of our parks through his leadership on this bill. GAOA will ensure that national parks receive the funding required to address deferred maintenance needs, remain accessible to all Americans, and continue to serve as economic engines for local communities in Colorado and across the country,” **said Will Shafroth, President and CEO of the National Park Foundation.**

“This is a momentous day for conservation in the United States. The Senate’s passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, which fully funds the LWCF and addresses the maintenance backlog on our public lands, is a huge step to enhance our public lands and rekindle and grow local outdoor recreation economies. We applaud Senators Gardner, Bennet, Manchin, Burr and all of the bipartisan leaders in the U.S. Senate for championing this critical conservation program,” **said Larry Selzer, President and CEO of The Conservation Fund.**

“Pew thanks Sens. Gardner and Manchin for their work with congressional leadership to pass the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act. Senate passage is a critical step to restoring our national parks and protecting recreation access on our public lands. It will also create jobs in communities that depend on these places for their economic stability, especially during these times when many Americans are renewing their connection to the great outdoors. We encourage the House to pass this landmark legislation quickly and send it to the president for his signature,” **said Marcia Argust, Project Director of the Pew Charitable Trusts’ Restore America’s Parks Campaign.**

“The Great American Outdoors Act is smart conservation. Senate passage of this historic and bipartisan bill will improve our natural resources and enhance access for America's hunters and anglers. It also makes lasting investments in our outdoor recreation economy at a time when we need to get Americans back to work. We want to thank Senator Gardner and Senator Manchin for working across the aisle to get this legislation passed,” **said Whit Fosburgh, President and CEO of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.**

“The Great American Outdoors Act not only creates permanent certainty for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, America's most successful conservation and access program; it also ensures sound stewardship of our public lands and waters. We applaud Senator Gardner's leadership and urge Congress to advance this legislation to President Trump without delay. Hunters, anglers and all outdoor recreation-loving Americans need to get outside – to reconnect with our traditions, find solace in nature and restore our spirits. The Great American Outdoors Act couldn't come at a better time, and its investments in local communities and our conservation legacy will yield immeasurable dividends,” **said John Gale, Conservation Director of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers.**

“Our National Parks and public lands are part of our heritage as Americans. By protecting and investing in them, we will ensure that generations to come will benefit from America's best idea. The American Conservation Coalition is proud to support the Great American Outdoors Act because it will protect this heritage and support the hundreds of thousands of Americans whose livelihoods are connected to our National Parks. Our members on over 200 campuses across the country thank Senator Gardner for his leadership and urge Congress to pass this historic piece of legislation,” **said Benji Backer, President and Founder of the American Conservation Coalition.**

“The outdoor industry applauds the U.S. Senate for seizing the opportunity to pass the Great American Outdoors Act, a landmark piece of bipartisan legislation. Along with the social and health benefits that being outdoors provides, there is also a strong economic case for doing this now. The outdoors are bipartisan, and investing in LWCF means investing in local economies and creating thousands of jobs – both of which we desperately need right now to help the country bounce back from COVID-19,” **said Lise Aangeenbrug, Executive Director of the Outdoor Industry Association.**

"The Great American Outdoors Act would be a historic step and have both an immediate and lasting impact. Not only would this legislation help restore our public lands and waters for generations to enjoy; completing maintenance and improvement projects in the outdoors could help put thousands of people to work and create more spaces for Americans to get outside and recreate safely. Thank you to Sen. Gardner and the many champions of this legislation. The Corps community stands ready to help our federal, state, and local resource management agencies address the maintenance backlog and advance our country's priorities in the great outdoors," **said Mary Ellen Sprenkel, President and CEO of The Corps Network.**

“As Americans across the country emerge from stay at home orders, there is an intense desire to get back to our cherished national lands. The Great American Outdoors Act offers innovative solutions and sustainable funding that will address the deferred maintenance backlog and ensure the safety and enjoyment for Americans today and decades to come. Campgrounds on federal lands are currently showing distressing signs of wear: crumbling roads and bridges; deferred maintenance needs; and limited camping availability, jeopardizing not only the RV industry but the entire outdoor recreation industry. We are grateful to the leadership of Senator Gardner to address the needs of our public lands and support outdoor recreation,” **said Jay Landers, Vice President of the RV Industry Association.**

“We are very thankful to Senators Cory Gardner, Steve Daines, Michael Bennet, Joe Manchin and others for their efforts to get the Great American Outdoors Act passed. Having access to outdoor recreation, including riding trails for dirt bikes, ATVs, and side-by-sides, is immensely beneficial for the physical and mental well-being of Americans — especially in these times. As public lands reopen, we need to have responsible planning and adequate infrastructure, which the GAOA would address, so visitors can enjoy the outdoors safely,” **said Erik Pritchard, President and CEO of the Motorcycle Industry Council, the Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, and the Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association.**

“The Great American Outdoors Act represents the largest commitment to conservation and public lands in our lifetime. Senator Gardner’s commitment to these priorities – alongside bipartisan members of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus – will pay dividends for hunters, anglers, fish, wildlife, other natural resources and our nation’s outdoor recreation economy for generations to come. We extend our sincere thanks to Senator Gardner for his steadfast leadership,” **said Jeff Crane, President of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation.**

“The passage of the Great American Outdoors Act is a truly historic conservation victory that will ensure that America’s public lands and treasured landscapes endure for future generations. It will also accelerate our economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis by creating hundreds of thousands of good jobs, while expanding outdoor recreational opportunities for every community in the country,” **said Collin O’Mara, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.** “We are grateful for the bipartisan leadership of Senators Cory Gardner (R-Colo), Joe Manchin (D-WVa), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Steve Daines (R-MT), Rob Portman (R-Ohio), and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) to pass this legislation. We urge the House to act swiftly to pass the bill and send it to the President’s desk.”

“For years, NPCA, communities and park advocates have fought to fix our park’s crumbling roads, worn-out recreational trails, failing water and sewer systems, and other repair needs totaling nearly \$12 billion,” **said Theresa Pierno, President and CEO of the National Parks Conservation Association.** “Thanks to the efforts of Senators Joe Manchin and Cory Gardner, we have strong bipartisan support for this important bill that will ensure the future of our parks for generations to come. Not only will it care for our most treasured places, it will help improve access to public lands and provide much-needed jobs across the country. We must continue this momentum and do all we can to get this bill over the finish line.”

“Full and dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund would be an enormous boost for the millions of people who need access to parks and public lands, and I’m pleased to see the bipartisan leadership in Congress moving parks and conservation funding forward. Thank you, Senators Gardner and Manchin for your continued leadership and commitment to ensuring full and dedicated funding to LWCF. LWCF has long enjoyed bipartisan support, and it will help ensure that hikers, bikers, hunters and birders can experience the beauty of the outdoors close to where they live,” **said Diane Regas, President and CEO of The Trust for Public Land.**

“In the Rocky Mountain West, public lands and trails are vital to our region’s economy and our quality of life. That’s why the certainty provided by full, permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund is so crucial. We’re pleased to see legislators who understand that leading the way once more in working to permanently fund LWCF, including Senator Gardner and his Western colleagues who are cosponsoring this bill like Senators Heinrich and Udall from New Mexico,” **said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition.**

“The Partnership for the National Trails System applauds Sens. Gardner and Manchin for their work in the US Senate to advance the Great American Outdoors Act, which will finally fully dedicate Land and Water Conservation Fund funding each year. This will be an enormous boost to the protection of critical natural and cultural resources and help close gaps along our 30 national scenic and historic trails. We also support investments that address the deferred maintenance backlog on our public lands. We stand ready to work on a bipartisan basis to get this over the finish line this year,” **said Barney Mann, President of the Partnership for the National Trails System.**

“Our national parks are more important than ever as destinations for travel and tourism, and we thank Sen. Gardner for his tireless leadership on this landmark legislation. In particular, funding the deferred maintenance backlog issues will create more than 100,000 jobs and add \$17.4 billion in economic output for the economy, which is desperately needed at this time. This bill will also help to make certain that national parks are critical centers of leisure travel and economic activity for the foreseeable future,” **said Roger Dow, President and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association.**

“The Senate’s bipartisan vote reflects what we all know -- protecting and enhancing our public lands is an essential part of the American ethos,” **said Steve Blackledge, Environment America’s Senior Conservation Program Director.** “By locking in \$900 million a year for outdoor projects, plus providing a short-term infusion of money to address maintenance issues, the Senate has acted to enhance America’s beautiful public lands. We thank them and we urge the House to follow suit.”

“We are very excited about the combination of job and recreational opportunities afforded under the Great American Outdoor Act. Ensuring that our country’s special places remain safe but accessible is a win-win for all Americans,” **said Dan Forster, Vice President and Chief Conservation Officer for the Archery Trade Association.**

“The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a critical federal program that helps landscape architects plan, design, and build world-class community parks and recreation centers. These are places where people come together to learn, grow, and share community experiences they can’t anywhere else. ASLA has long supported full and permanent funding for LWCF and seeing this bill move forward – along with a measure to fix the crumbling infrastructure in our national parks – is truly a great win, not only for landscape architects but for communities across the nation,” **said Wendy Miller, FASLA, President, American Society of Landscape Architects.**

“Senate passage of the Great American Outdoors Act with overwhelming bipartisan support brings us one step closer to an historic achievement on behalf of historic and cultural resources and our public lands. This legislation is a bipartisan solution that would provide \$9.5 billion in dedicated funding over five years for much needed repairs of the National Park Service and other federal agencies. Along with fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund, this bill would ensure preservation of some of our nation’s most iconic historic places. We thank Senator Gardner, along with Senators Portman, Warner, Alexander, King, Manchin, Daines, Cantwell and others for their leadership on this once-in-a-generation legislative accomplishment for our public lands,” **said Tom Cassidy, Vice President for Government Relations and Policy at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.**

“The passage of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) means so much more than simply restoring our national parks. For literally millions of small businesses located in gateway communities near these national treasures, including private RV parks and campgrounds, it means increases in Americans recreating and supporting the success of all businesses that make up the outdoor recreation industry. Because of this, ARVC is proud to stand with the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (ORR) in calling on Congress to pass the important bipartisan GAOA,” **said Paul Bambei, President and CEO of the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds.**

“We have a duty to be good stewards of God’s creation, to protect and defend the beauty of the land and water, and to have clean skies and fresh air for our children to enjoy. It is vital that we restore our parks so that the nearly 300 million annual visitors can have a safe, enjoyable, and sacred experience. Americans deserve safe and functional public lands, and that is why the Great American Outdoors Act is so crucial. This legislation also provides a much-needed boost for the economy and putting America back

to work,” **said Rev. Mitchell C. Hescox, President and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network.**

“Western Energy Alliance strongly supports taking funding from oil and natural gas production on non-park federal lands and directing it into fixing our national parks. For too long our parks have suffered from eroded trails, crumbling roads and bridges, and other maintenance shortfalls. Offshore oil and natural gas production already provides 100% of the funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and this bill would enable onshore oil and natural gas royalty and lease revenues to go directly into our beloved national parks,” **said Kathleen Sgamma, President of Western Energy Alliance.**

“NRPA applauds the Senate for passing the Great American Outdoors Act. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a program that is incredibly important for communities across America. This marks a huge win for our more than 60,000 members and advocates, who work tirelessly to serve the public with parks and trails in urban and rural communities throughout the country,” **said Kristine Stratton, President and CEO of the National Recreation and Park Association.** “The Great American Outdoors Act enjoys strong bipartisan support for providing critical resources to local communities for conservation, parks and recreation. Now, we urge the House to pass the Great American Outdoors Act and ensure that LWCF becomes fully funded and therefore can effectively serve communities through parks, outdoor recreation, conservation, and health and wellness. It’s time for the House to finish the job.”

“A surge in visitors to America’s public lands through the years has led to an accumulation of wear and tear,” **said Adam Putnam, CEO of Ducks Unlimited.** “Especially in these difficult times, many have sought refuge and recreation on our nation’s extraordinary natural landscapes. That demand for outdoor recreation is a good thing. The Great American Outdoors Act will enable Americans to continue enjoying the great outdoors by ensuring our public lands are a safe and suitable place for all varieties of responsible recreation. A fully funded LWCF provides a boost to our nation’s vital outdoor economy, including at the state and local levels, and ensures this legislation is truly a homerun for conservation and recreation enthusiasts alike.”

“The Great American Outdoors Act is the single greatest piece of conservation and outdoor recreation legislation before Congress in decades,” **said Jessica Turner, Executive Director of Outdoor Recreation Roundtable.** “It’s overwhelmingly bipartisan passage in the Senate is proof that the outdoors crosses party lines and resonates with all Americans. We applaud Senate Republicans and Democrats

for working together tirelessly to get this done. The entire outdoor recreation industry thanks every Senator who supported this bill and urges the House to move quickly to pass this measure so we can finally fully fund LWCF and begin the much-needed work on rebuilding infrastructure on our public lands and waters.”

“Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and increased uncertainty as the country continues the process of reopening, it is encouraging to see our nation’s policymakers coming together and prioritizing legislation that ensures both local economies and families can reap the benefits of outdoor recreation activities like boating and fishing,” **said Frank Hugelmeyer, President of the National Marine Manufacturers Association.** “Thanks to this overwhelmingly bipartisan effort, the Great American Outdoors Act is one step closer to protecting and expanding outdoor recreation opportunities across the country and we call on the U.S. House of Representatives to swiftly consider and pass this critical measure.”

“As national parks and forests across the country look to safely reopen, it’s encouraging to see the overwhelming support of Senators recognizing the need to direct significant funds toward critical deferred maintenance and campground modernization needs on our public lands and waters,” **said Craig Kirby, President of the RV Industry.** “We are grateful to the 73 Senators who voted today to pass the Great American Outdoors Act and address these issues through this landmark legislation that supports outdoor recreation and conservation in our most treasured lands for generations to come.”

“In these incredibly challenging times, it’s heartening to see the U.S. Senate come together and overwhelmingly support something so integral to our economy and way of life – our public lands,” **said Mike Leonard, Vice President, Government Affairs for the American Sportfishing Association (ASA).** “The sportfishing industry is grateful to Senate leadership and the many Great American Outdoors Act Senate champions, led by Sen. Gardner, for prioritizing this truly historic bill and working tirelessly to ensure its passage.”

“Our parks and public lands are the heart of our communities. That’s why people across the country need healthier, safer and better access to public lands, parks and outdoor spaces. Since the pandemic hit, we’ve seen how being outside on public lands has been a crucial way for many people to refresh their spirits and build community, but also the stark inequities in who has access to these parks and healing outdoor spaces. The need to safeguard the funding that goes towards our public lands, ensure they are protected and maintained, and guarantee we are providing safe, welcoming opportunities for all people to

benefit from them is more urgent than ever,” **said Jamie Williams, President of the Wilderness Society.** “Today’s Senate passage of the ‘Great American Outdoors Act’ gets us a step closer to Congress keeping a promise to the people it serves to invest in the natural, recreational and cultural resources that anchor our communities. We now call on the House to keep up this energy and quickly get the ‘Great American Outdoors Act’ to the President’s desk, and with it, finally get full, permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund over the finish line.”

“We applaud Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Steve Daines (R-MT) for their persistent leadership to advance the most significant conservation legislation in nearly half a century – The Great American Outdoors Act. This important bipartisan legislation provides dedicated funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund and addresses the maintenance backlog plaguing our national parks and treasured public lands. Utilizing public lands for responsible clean energy development is a win-win for the environment and the livelihood of our national parks. It creates immediate job opportunities, encourages outdoor recreation, and protects our public lands for generations to come,” **said Heather Reams, Executive Director of Citizens for Responsible Energy Solutions (CRES).**

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Cory Gardner is a member of the U.S. Senate serving Colorado. He sits on the Energy & Natural Resources Committee, the Foreign Relations Committee, the Commerce, Science, & Transportation Committee, and is the Chairman of the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy.