



CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL COALITION

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Media Contacts:

Martyn Pearson
Gila Hike & Bike
Tel: (575) 388-3222
Email: martynpearson56@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/GilaHikeandBike
Website: www.gilahikeandbike.com

Amanda Wheelock
Continental Divide Trail Coalition
Tel: (720) 924-1616
Email: awheelock@continentaldividetrail.org
Facebook: facebook.com/ContinentalDivideTrailCoalition
Website: www.continentaldividetrail.org

NEW MEXICO BUSINESS LEADERS URGE CONGRESS TO SAVE LWCF

SILVER CITY, Nm. (Nov. 13, 2018) – A coalition of more [than 75 New Mexico business owners sent a letter to New Mexico's Congressional delegation](#) earlier today, urging them to permanently reauthorize and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Almost all of the businesses are in small, rural communities along the Continental Divide, and their letter stresses the importance of LWCF funding to their local economies.

Before Congress let it expire on September 30, the Land and Water Conservation Fund was a vitally important funding source for public lands. Since its creation 54 years ago, LWCF has invested more than \$312 million to create and protect parks, open spaces, wildlife habitat, and public access across New Mexico. Using money from offshore oil and gas leasing, LWCF has helped protect iconic New Mexico destinations such as Valles Caldera National Preserve, the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, and Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, as well as local treasures such as Pioneer Women's Park in Las Cruces and Albuquerque's Phil Chacon Park.

"The Land and Water Conservation Fund is vital to protecting New Mexico's public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities, and those places in turn have a huge impact on our local businesses and tourism economy," said Martyn Pearson, co-owner of Gila Hike & Bike in Silver City. "When people come to our shop, they are asking how they can access public lands and trails."

The business leaders point to public lands and trails protected by LWCF as a key driver of New Mexico's growing outdoor recreation economy, [which generates 99,000 jobs and \\$10 billion in annual consumer spending across the state](#).

The letter also highlights the effect that LWCF's expiration will have on the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT), which begins at the Mexican border southeast of Lordsburg and stretches over 3,100 miles along the spine of the Rocky Mountains before ending at the Canadian border. Although 2018 marks the 40th anniversary of the trail's designation by Congress, the CDT is still incomplete, primarily because it can only be routed along highways and other roads where it traverses areas with no access to public land.



The 5,867-acre Alamocita Creek property in central New Mexico was protected using LWCF funds in 2016. This purchase could help complete over 50 miles of the Continental Divide Trail.

In 2016, LWCF funding was used to purchase 5,867 acres of land near Pie Town that, in addition to conserving important big game habitat, will one day connect sections of the CDT separated by a road walk of more than 50 miles. But crucial gaps in public ownership remain, and without LWCF, the letter states, there is no obvious path to completion for this National Scenic Trail.



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“The Continental Divide Trail is a vital resource that provides economic benefits for communities as well as physical and mental health benefits for those who walk or ride it,” said Teresa Martinez, Executive Director of the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, a non-profit organization that works to complete, promote, and protect the trail. “As Congress returns to session today, we are proud to see these business leaders sending a strong message that New Mexico values the CDT, and the CDT needs LWCF.”

The Continental Divide Trail Coalition has also published a [video](#) and a [fact sheet](#) that detail the importance of LWCF to New Mexico and its 820-mile section of the CDT.

Congressman Steve Pearce (NM-2) is the only member of New Mexico’s Congressional delegation who has refused to sponsor legislation that would reauthorize LWCF. Meanwhile, New Mexico Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich along with Congressman Ben Ray Luján and Congresswoman Michelle Lujan Grisham have been vocal advocates of the fund. “The LWCF is one of the country’s best conservation programs, preserving public lands and ensuring access to outdoor recreation in rural and urban areas,” wrote Heinrich and Udall in a [letter to Senate leadership](#) in early August.

Newly elected Congresswomen Xochitl Torres Small and Deb Haaland have both [stated their support](#) for permanent reauthorization and full funding of LWCF. With strong bipartisan support for LWCF reauthorization in the Senate and a new Democratic majority in the House after last week’s midterm elections, there may be hope for LWCF yet – but these business owners don’t want Congress to stall on the issue any longer.

“Since LWCF expired in September, our public lands have lost out on over \$100 million in funding. That’s money that could have gone toward protecting our parks and sustaining local economies here in New Mexico,” said Pearson. “We want to see Congress act before one more dollar is lost.”

[Read the full letter here.](#)

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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