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## Aspen councilman heads to D.C. for mountain town advocacy

- [Curtis Wackerle, Aspen Daily News Staff Writer](#)
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Aspen Councilman Ward Hauenstein is on his way to Washington, D.C., this week for meetings on Capitol Hill with members of an advocacy group called the Mountain Pact, which works on environmental and public lands policy.

Aspen Chamber Resort Association photo

Aspen City Councilman Ward Hauenstein was at first skeptical of whether it would be worth his time to join a delegation of ski-town elected officials traveling to Washington, D.C., this week to advocate with an organization called the Mountain Pact, which has a

stated goal of pushing back against the Trump administration on the environment and public lands.

“I could stay here and talk to a rock,” Hauenstein said.

The council member, however, was convinced of the trip’s potential utility for the citizens of Aspen by Ann Mullins, a fellow council person who has attended Mountain Pact “D.C. fly ins” in the past.

“She said, yah, but you meet people there you make relationships with,” Hauenstein said.

Hauenstein is on his way to our nation’s capital today for two days of meetings. Perhaps the most critical of those will be scheduled times with Rep. Scott Tipton and Rep. Joe Neguse, members of Congress whose districts encompass the Western Slope. As of last week, it was unclear if the trip would include meetings with representatives of any federal agencies that manage public lands. If those meetings were to take place, they would be focused on career officials, not political appointees, said Ashely Perl, the city of Aspen’s climate action manager.

The meetings with the members of Congress have the potential to move the needle on one of the Mountain Pact’s key priorities. Congress recently reauthorized the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which sets aside a portion of the royalties paid to the government from off-shore oil and gas drilling for environmental programs and grants. Yet Congress has yet to fully fund the LWCF, so that is on the top of the “key lobby asks” list the Mountain Pact has distributed to its members in advance of the trip.

Tipton is a Republican Hauenstein said he shares little with in terms of policy values. He is hoping to make a connection on the importance of protecting the environment and public lands for future generations. He’s been advised not to get bogged down in the details of policy, but instead try to make a personal connection in order to carry on conversations in the future, he said. Hauenstein said he figures it is worth a shot.

Hauenstein will be joined on the trip by elected officials from Avon, Frisco, Steamboat Springs and South Lake Tahoe.

# Federal policy monitor

The city has been involved with the Mountain Pact since it was formed in 2014. Representatives from over 35 mountain towns and counties signed on to a June letter to congressional representatives regarding the LWCF.

The city appreciates the Mountain Pact because “they monitor what is happening at the federal level and let us know when things are happening that are going to impact mountain towns,” Perl said.

Under the Trump administration, “we are not putting a ton of resources” toward federal policy advocacy, which may increase the importance of the Mountain Pact’s role, Perl said, “because it is harder to stay in touch on the things we really should be aware of.”

Besides the LWCF, the Mountain Pact has been engaged on recalculating oil and gas royalties to send more money to local communities impacted by resource extraction; securing federal funding for wildfire response; pushing back against efforts to deregulate methane waste from oil and gas drilling; and working to maintain the size of the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments, among other priorities.

“Through an innovative lens, the Mountain Pact empowers mountain communities to build resilience in the face of economic and environmental stresses through a shared voice on federal policy related to climate, public lands and outdoor recreation,” says a mission statement on the group’s [website](#).

Curtis Wackerle is the editor of Aspen Daily News. He can be reached at [curtis@aspendailynews.com](mailto:curtis@aspendailynews.com) or on Twitter @CurtisWackerle.