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Opinion: Let's celebrate passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. Now we need the CORE Act.

PUBLISHED ON SEP 15, 2020 2:53AM MDT

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OPINION

Mayor Sarah Smith Hymes

Special to The Colorado Sun

Just for fun, I decided to look up the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) projects in all the places I've lived in the United States.

What I found is astonishing. From Connecticut to Vermont to New Jersey to D.C. to Avon, Colorado, each has a special place made possible by the LWCF, a bipartisan initiative founded in 1964.

The LWCF has sponsored projects in every county in every state, from coast to coast. My sons, born and raised in Colorado, were nurtured by the public lands that surround us.



Avon Mayor Sarah Smith Hymes

Here at home in Eagle County, LWCF has touched our lives with investments like Sylvan Lake, the Dowd Junction path, and most recently the Eagle River Park.

The legacy of public lands was ensured by passage of the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA). The impact of this legislation cannot be overstated; it will protect and preserve public lands now and for generations to come.

The GAOA achieves two critical objectives. First, it allocates \$9.5 billion over the next five years to fund the maintenance backlog in our national parks, creating jobs related to trail maintenance, facility repairs, and park improvements.

Second, it permanently guarantees that the work of LWCF can continue with \$900 million annually allocated from the royalties paid to the federal government for oil and gas drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf.

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Our public lands do more than bolster our physical, mental, and spiritual health; they are a critical economic driver in communities across Colorado.

The Outdoor Industry Association estimates consumers spend nearly \$28 billion on outdoor recreation in Colorado alone each year. Colorado's public lands support an estimated 229,000 jobs, generating \$9.7 billion in wages and \$2 billion in taxes for local and state governments.



Supporting public lands has become even more crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, as communities rely on them to recover physically, emotionally, and financially.

We are grateful to Rep. Joe Neguse both for being a champion of the GAOA and for sponsoring the Colorado Outdoor Recreation (CORE) Act, the next critical step in protecting public lands in Colorado.

The CORE Act would protect 400,000 acres of public land in Colorado from oil fields and other development, and designate the first National Historic Landscape at Camp Hale to honor the location of the 10th Mountain Division's winter training camp.

New jobs for mountain communities whose economies have been devastated by the pandemic would be an ancillary benefit of this important legislation.

Sarah Smith Hymes is Mayor of Avon, Colorado. She represents over 6,400 year-round residents, 3,500 second-home owners, and 500,000 annual visitors to the Town of Avon.
